

Where does Bangladesh cricket actually stand?

AL-AMIN

Ever since Bangladesh advanced into the Super Eights of the World Cup at the expense of India there was a debate between two schools of thoughts.

The hardliners described Bangladesh's incredible victory against India as a flash in the pan. They also observed that the Tigers would be misfits in a fiercely competitive second round of the showpiece event.

The saner section, on the other hand, described Bangladesh's comprehensive victory over India as the team's coming of age. They also hailed the Tigers as one of the most attractive young brigades capable of doing better things in the future. It would have been quite comfortable had the debate stopped at that point.

But unfortunately Bangladesh, like it's more colourful neighbours India, has got mindless followers whose emotion often beats logic. The whole nation was over the moon since early hours of March 26, a very

special day in the history of the country. It was quite understandable when we rejoiced the success against Bermuda that confirmed the Tigers of a place in the next round.

But wasn't that something like an excess what followed when many including the knowledgeable section started thinking of 'going all the way to the semifinals' or sweeping comments like 'winning has become a habit for us' or 'I don't want to take the win as an upset'.

But after the Tigers' two games in the Super Eights phase, those 'sweet' words suddenly turned sour and a few of them have already started to vomit in talk shows on different TV channels. Not only that they are also blowing hot and cold in the changed scenario after two heavy defeats against world champions Australia and New Zealand.

Were those two defeats -- a 10-wicket demolition by the Aussies in a rain-reduced match followed by a nine-wicket thrashing by their trans-Tasman rivals -- unex-

pected?

The talk show gives the audience a new food for thought while the experts start to give X-ray reports at length just to appease the frustrated millions.

"Aftab should not have played that expansive lofted shot that virtually sparked the collapse against New Zealand," was the opening of an expert.

"Bangladesh started on a solid footing with Javed (Omar) and Tamim (Iqbal)..."

But these are all lame excuses. It is all about attitude. If Javed is allowed to play his natural game that he has been doing over the years, then why blame Aftab for playing his natural game on a wicket tailor-made for shot making.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a former Bangladesh Cricket Board president, was quite right when he said: "After all these years if Javed is the choice for an out-of-form Shahriar Nafees then I'm sorry to say that our cricket has improved that we claim."

Captain Habibur Bashar said

after the New Zealand match that Tamim was instructed to check his shots in the early overs.

We can have a debate on that management decision but would Bashar please tell us about his comical display while fielding or when will he start scoring runs and at what position?

But these are trivial issues. The problem lies somewhere else. We need to find why the players are committing the same mistakes, why the attitude has not changed. It's nothing new when people say we have got a lot of talents. Perhaps Mohammad Ashraful is the oldest 'young' talent in the history of world cricket. The fear is that we might see the fresh batch of talents vanish in the oblivion much like the Al-Shahriars, Kapalis or the Hannans who were once touted as the best players of their generation by the same team management.

It is about time the management had a facelift whatever the Tigers experience in their next four games of the World Cup.

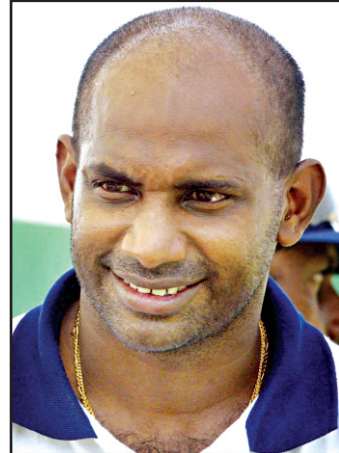


South Africa paceman Shaun Pollock successfully appeals for a leg-before decision over Ireland opener Jeremy Bray during their World Cup Super Eights match at the Guyana National Stadium in Georgetown on Tuesday.



Did U Know?

England's John Briggs, in his 25th Test, became the first bowler to reach the landmark of 100 wickets.



Sanath Jayasuriya

(Sri Lankan master batsman)
"This is one of the best knocks I've played. It came in the World Cup and in a crucial game. We lost to South Africa the other day and we didn't want to lose again. Although I have 25 centuries, I'll never forget this one."

After scoring a match-winning century against West Indies in the Super Eights on April 1.



BTV & SET Max

ICC World Cup 2007
(Super Eights)
England v Sri Lanka
Live at 7:30 pm



B.League
Sk Russel v Farashganj (4:45 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
National Cricket League
(One-Day)
Rajshahi v Dhaka
Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium
Chittagong v Barisal
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Sylhet v Khulna
Venue: BKSP

Greg facing the axe

AFP, New Delhi



Coach Greg Chappell appears the most likely casualty when India's cricket chiefs meet later this week to pin the blame for the World Cup debacle.

Some former captains, including Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev, will join the two-day session in Mumbai on Friday and Saturday to find out why India were ousted in the first round in the Caribbean.

The logical answer would be that Rahul Dravid's men were just not good enough. What else can one say of a team that failed to bat out 50 overs in 13 of its last 17 one-dayers on foreign soil?

Heads will roll. It is usually the preferred option of Indian cricket administrators during a crisis, so

long as those heads do not belong to one of their own.

Indian cricket chief Sharad Pawar, a political heavyweight and a federal minister in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government, has promised to give Chappell a fair hearing this week.

Chappell, who will present his own report at the Mumbai meeting, may himself not seek renewal of his 300,000-dollar a year contract that ended with the World Cup exit, a source close to the coach told AFP.

The outspoken former Australian captain and batting great generated more heat, controversy and headlines in two years as coach than his general predecessor John Wright did in five years on the job.

Chappell became the media's whipping boy early in his tenure when criticism of Sourav Ganguly's laidback attitude saw the country's most successful captain being thrown out of the team.

Chappell's displeasure at the

exclusion of juniors like Suresh Raina for the World Cup, as revealed in a text message to a journalist, raised the heckles of both the selectors and senior players.

"If Greg had his way, even Sachin Tendulkar would have been dropped," the Kolkata-based Telegraph newspaper quoted an unnamed selector as saying.

In hindsight, Chappell may have been right since neither Tendulkar, one-day cricket's most successful batsman, nor the other experienced players managed to take India past the first round.

Influential cricket officials believe the team has not moved forward in the two years that Chappell has been coach. Many say the 2003 World Cup finalists have fallen behind other teams.

Will Dravid remain captain? Will Tendulkar and other seniors like

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Brothers return strongly



SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union returned to winning ways with a commanding 3-1 defeat of Arambagh yesterday that put them among the top four of the B. League.

Smarting from a shocking 4-2 loss to visiting Khulna Abahani at home last week, Brothers displayed a matured account at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with strikes from Jalaluddin and Elijah Junior and an own goal by Arambagh defender Sharif Khan steering them to their second win in

four games. Brothers raised their collection to seven points to topple Arambagh, who briefly came back in the game with a penalty goal by Thomas Biketi, in the table with better goal difference.

The Oranges came alive immediately after the kick-off and midfielder Jalal sent a cross into the box only to see a powerful hit by Nigerian striker Junior being blocked by Piru at the Arambagh goal in the fourth minute.

Five minutes later, Moroccan midfielder Hicham Inani inspired the Gopibagh outfit to go ahead after hard work at the left wing. Although Piru punched out Inani's centre, Junior's volley came off a rival defender to find Jalal, who beat Piru with a low angled drive from the top of the box.

Kenyan striker Nico Dimas came

close to equalise in the 16th minute but the Arambagh forward, who struck thrice in the team's wins in the previous two rounds, failed to nod the ball after a pin-point cross by Ugandan medio Iddi.

Arambagh kept the pressure and Dimas earned a penalty in the 37th minute when he was fouled from the back by rival centre-back Shuvra after invading the Brothers box with a headed pass from compatriot Dominic. It was Biketi who levelled the score from the spot, drilling the ball low into Mohammed Ali's left hand post.

In a more lively second half, Arambagh came close to take the lead but Dimas once again wasted a chance when he mishheaded Ritu's cross from close range in the 50th minute.

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Nigerian striker Junior (L) of Brothers Union blasts the ball towards the Arambagh Krishna Sangha post during their B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

'Dravid must stay captain'

PTI, Mumbai

Springing to the support of beleaguered captain Rahul Dravid, Cricket Board Secretary Niranjan Shah on Tuesday said there was no better man than the Bangalore stalwart to lead the Indian team in the aftermath of the squad's debacle in the World Cup.

"There's no better option than Dravid as captain, but this is my personal view. I feel another youngster can be groomed under him to take over at a later stage," the BCCI official said.

Shah categorically said that he had not formed this opinion after interacting with coach Greg Chappell following the team's return last week from the West Indies.

He also said the BCCI's Working Committee was to decide on April seven about the future of Chappell who was appointed as the coach till the World Cup.

But the BCCI official denied that the former Australian captain had indicated his unwillingness to continue if he was offered the post again.

"The Working Committee will take the decision on the appointment of a new coach for the team. But Greg Chappell has not hinted about his unwillingness to continue as coach (as reported in a national daily)," Shah added.

England must win

AFP, St John's



England head into their Super Eights clash with Sri Lanka here Wednesday knowing defeat could all but end their chances of reaching the World Cup semifinals.

Michael Vaughan's men, handicapped by a six-wicket loss to fellow Group C qualifiers New Zealand during their opening match, which meant they didn't carry forward two points to the second round, face a make or break week.

England, after playing Sri Lanka, return to the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium on Sunday to take on reigning champions Australia, who've won five out of five at this World Cup.

Although it's mathematically possible for England to lose both games and still reach the semifinals, realistically they need to win at least one of their two matches this week to have a hope of reaching the last four for the first time since 1992.

The omens against Sri Lanka are not good. Last year Mahela Jayawardene's team beat England 5-0 in a one-day series, culminating in an extraordinary eight-wicket

triumph at Headingley.

Set 322 to win, Sri Lanka made 324 for two after a world record opening stand of 286 between Upul Tharanga (109) and Sanath Jayasuriya (152).

Since that match in July, England have tinkered with their side to such an extent that top-order batsman Ian Bell is likely to be the only survivor come Wednesday although Andrew Strauss, captain that day, could come in for fellow opener Ed Joyce.

Whoever England field as a first-wicket partnership, they don't have a pair to match the rapid scoring of the Sri Lankan duo and no-one near the class of experienced left-hander Jayasuriya, who made 115 in Sunday's 113-run thrashing of hosts West Indies.

However, England coach Duncan Fletcher said there was no point trying to make the likes of Vaughan and Joyce play someone else's game.

"We mustn't ask players to do things that are foreign to them, because that could really be pretty disastrous. All our players must play to their strengths," he said.

England, who gave themselves and the rest of the cricket world a confidence boost with their 2-0 win against Australia in the finals of the CB series, have seen their standards slip in a series of lacklustre wins against minnows Canada,

Kenya and Ireland.

The top three have repeatedly failed to come good while, in the field, England have only twice bowled sides out and even then made hard work of taking 10 wickets against Kenya and Ireland.

"We've had a good chat about intensity and we need to have our fingers on the pulse this week," star batsman Kevin Pietersen said.

"The other day against Ireland we got six wickets and then the last few batters scored a load of runs. The intensity dropped off a bit, but that is natural.

"The boys have spoken about it and we know we have to keep our intensity up throughout."

By contrast, Sri Lanka look to have a far more balanced team with left-armed Chaminda Vaas and the unorthodox Lasith Malinga, whose four wickets in four balls almost set-up a stunning win against South Africa, a handful for any batting side long before off-spin maestro Muttiah Muralidaran comes on.

"One of the great things about our side is that we have a variety and balance," said Sri Lanka wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara.

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Pak detective to fly to Kingston

AFP, Karachi



help police investigating the death of cricket coach Bob Woolmer, officials said Tuesday.

Senior police investigator Mir Zubair Mahmood is being accompanied by another security official and both are expected to leave on Wednesday, Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Naseem Ashraf told AFP.

"We are sending two highly qualified investigators to Jamaica including Mir Zubair, who had resolved the Daniel Pearl case," Ashraf said.

"The investigators will not only assess the Jamaican police, they will find out the progress in the investigation so far. They will stay till the outcome of the final probe," he added.

Wall Street Journal reporter Pearl was kidnapped in the southern city of Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story on Islamic extremists. A video of his decapitation was later delivered to the US consulate.

Police quickly caught a British-born militant, Sheikh Omar, and three Pakistani militants in connection with the crime. They were sentenced to death in 2002 but have appealed against the verdict.

Investigator Zubair said his new

task was a major challenge as all Pakistanis wanted to know who killed Woolmer, who was found strangled at the Pegasus Hotel on March 18.

"It's a big, big responsibility on our shoulders and I hope we will be able to live up to the expectations," he said.

The investigator said however that Woolmer's case was still being handled by the Jamaican police, under Jamaican law, he said.

"Our terms of reference are limited. We will only assess them and exchange information," Zubair said.

Pakistani officials have privately expressed frustration at the pace of the probe into the murder of Woolmer, which came a day after Pakistan were knocked out of the cricket World Cup.

Jamaican detectives leading the

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TODAY'S MATCH		
Team	Time	Venue
England v Sri Lanka	7:30 pm	Antigua

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