



Sri Lanka paceman Chaminda Vaas celebrates after dismissing New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming during the World Cup Super Eights match at the Grenada National Stadium in St. George on Thursday.

Silky Shakib stands tall

CRICINFO, undated



Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, once warned his fellow Africans of "squandering the golden opportunities of independence". And while politics and sports are uneasy bedfellows at the best of times, Bangladesh will look back on this game as one that got away, an opportunity to enhance further their status among cricket's league of nations. Had either Mashrafe Mortaza, Mohammad Rafique or Abdur Razzak shown a little more awareness of the situation, they could have finished with 180, a total that would have posed many uncomfortable questions of an English side that was as clueless against the three left-arm spinners as South Africa and India had been.

One of the trio, Shakib Al Hasan, had batted quite superbly, eschewing the more flamboyant shots in his repertoire after making a stroke-filled start. Before their last game, he had announced that he had nothing to fear from the South Africans as he'd already played against Australia and New Zealand - brave words that looked a touch foolish when he was out cheaply. So when he walked out to the middle with the scoreboard showing 26 for 3, you might have forgiven him a bit of trepidation.

Sajid Mahmood already had two wickets and was getting disconcerting bounce off a good length, but circumspection was the last thing on Shakib's mind as he stepped back and struck a glorious cover-drive off the second ball he faced. As you watched the ball race to the fence, it was hard to believe that this was a

20-year-old who only picked up the bat six years ago. Till then, football and badminton were his games -- a cousin plays football professionally -- and his early exploits with the cricket bat were restricted to tennis-ball games. Luckily for Bangladesh, someone was watching, and he was fast-tracked into the academy. The story goes that he started as a No. 10, and broke down in tears once because he wasn't getting chances to bat in the nets.

Soon he was a star with the Under-19s, and a national cap followed in July 2006. Since then, he's performed wonders with both bat and ball, and the composed half-century against India played a massive part in ensuring that there would be no late slip. On Wednesday, he had to grind out the runs, not helped by wickets falling steadily against the hard white ball.

Opportunities though weren't missed. Andrew Flintoff was welcomed into the attack with a deft cut to third man, and there was then a stunning six over backward point in the best traditions of Gilchrist and Jayasuriya. "He doesn't get nervous at all and is very confident," Rabeed Imam, the Bangladesh media manager, said and his point was illustrated by two sublime drives through extra-cover as Shakib took 27 from the 38 balls that Flintoff bowled to him.

"It was a fantastic effort from him," Habibur Bashar, the captain, said. "If one guy could have given him support, it would have been a different ball game. He's a young kid, and he showed that no matter what the conditions, you can be positive."

The conditions were admittedly difficult early on, with the ball

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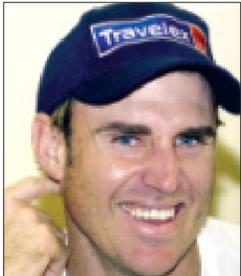


Did U Know?

Current Australia cricket captain Ricky Ponting tops the group of best World Cup fielders with 18 catches in his 28 matches to date.



BTV & SET Max
ICC World Cup 2007 (Super Eights)
Australia v Ireland
Live at 7:30 pm



Matthew Hayden
(Star Australia opening batsman)
"It's too long. It's too long for every one."
Demanding the 47-day tournament trimmed.



B.League
Ctg Abahani v Ctg Mohammedan
Venue: MA Aziz Stadium
Time: 3:45 pm
Mohammedan v Rahmatganj
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Time: 4:45 pm

AUSTRALIA V IRELAND Poised for the semis

AFP, Bridgetown



Australia are poised to storm into the World Cup semifinals without being seriously challenged as they take on debutants Ireland in their Super Eights match here on Friday.

The defending champions were not tested on their way to posting six successive victories, including three in the group. They look set to continue the trend, considering Ireland's limited resources.

Australia and New Zealand are the only unbeaten sides in the tournament with eight points from four matches and need just one more win to assure themselves of a place in the semifinals.

Ricky Ponting's Australians have been playing quality cricket for more than a month.

They may be meeting a winless Ireland, but looked in no mood to take the game lightly.

When asked whether Australia were expecting a warm-up game on Friday, fast bowler Shaun Tait said: "No, it's not a warm-up match. We have got to be at our top form. We take this game as seriously as against any other side."

"We are in the Super Eights now. If we relax in any of these games and then come up against a big side, we might get done then. We just want to concentrate on what we are doing at the moment."

Australia will meet New Zealand and Sri Lanka in their last two matches.

"They (Sri Lanka and New Zealand) are the teams playing quality cricket at the moment and we expect them to be a quality threat," said Tait, who was named man of the match in his team's previous game against England.

Australia's batting has flour-

ished in almost all the matches, with openers Matthew Hayden and Adam Gilchrist providing solid starts and skipper Ricky Ponting and Michael Clarke building the innings.

"They have not felt the absence of injured paceman Brett Lee as Tait has been performing consistently well along with veteran Glenn McGrath and Nathan Bracken."

"I expected to have a good run at some time in the World Cup. It's good to have success," said Tait, who has so far grabbed 11 wickets in six matches in the Caribbean.

"It has been fantastic coming into the Australian team and playing with these guys. It has helped my game by learning from them. It helps a lot observing them and working out with them and bowling with them."

"I feel a lot more confident bowling now than a few months ago."

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Facile win for local academy

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Academy (BCA) took a 1-0 lead against Pakistan Academy in the two-match four-day series when they handed the visitors a 77-run defeat in the first match yesterday.

The home side needed 10.1 overs on the fourth and final morning at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur to take the last wicket and wrap up the Pakistan second innings for 143.

Aaqib Javed's side, who were chasing 221 for victory, resumed on 130-9 with Zhoab Khan (22) and Najaf Shah (0) at the crease.

Najaf failed to add any run to his overnight score but his new ball partner Zhoab reached 33 before being undone by Bangladesh skipper Mehrab Hossain's left-arm spin, giving a catch behind the stumps to wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain.

SCORES IN BRIEF
BANGLADESH ACADEMY: 223 and 222.

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Was there a plan?

MOHAMMAD ISAM



Having been lauded on a number of occasions for their vision, the Bangladesh team management took their eye off the ball on Wednesday. Apparently there was no planning right from the word go. Something or the other would have gone wrong given the preparation taken by the team management, led by captain Habibur Bashar. Surely they knew it was a tough tie against England on a bouncy Kensington Oval wicket at Bridgetown but a little planning would have made life a lot easier for the Tigers.

Starting from the team selection, it all went downhill in terms of management. Questions were rife when they broke the winning combination to make room for out-of-sorts Shahriar Nafees at the top of the order. On a wicket that had enough movement to trouble the technically tight Ian Bell and Michael Vaughan, it was a trifle careless to let Nafees play in his bad patch. For a man who has nothing to show for in his last nine innings against top opposition, it was the management's first blunder.

Then came the Habibur Bashar-shocker. What on earth was he looking at when his opposite number (and equally careless) Michael Vaughan dropped that dolly from Nafees? He was miles out of the crease when Paul Nixon whipped off the balls from a frustrated Vaughan throw. This was not the first time that Bashar embarrassed himself. In this World Cup, this was his third run-out (against Sri Lanka and New Zealand).

Last year at Fatullah during a crucial passage of play in the first Test against Australia, Bashar was strolling by the time Michael Clarke had knocked the stumps down with a direct hit from square-leg. His comical dismissal simply showed how the team management looked at the match -- with trepidation.

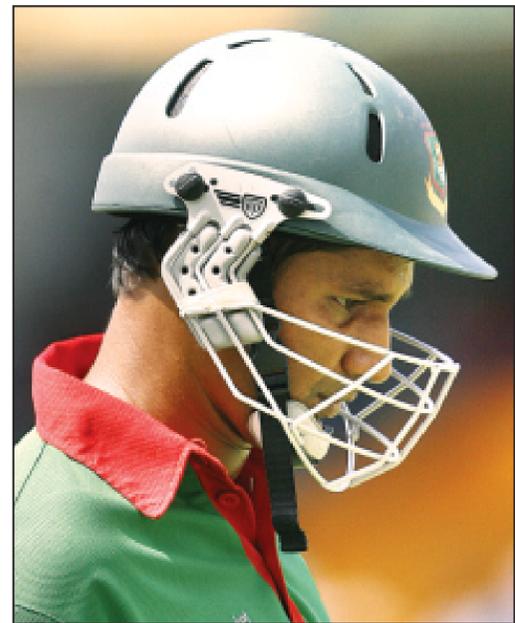
But amazingly, and quite refreshingly, the players were up for a win. It never looked that winning was not an option to them. Their body language spoke for their mindset.

It looked as if they wanted to win but were restricted by a lack of prior preparation for this kind of pitch. And as it always happens, their laziness was on display. The batting order was hastily prepared; when Sajid Mahmood made the ball move, Mushfiqur Rahim was shuttled up to number four. His

dismissal was just a matter of time. Bating usually reflects how the management thinks on their feet because much of it is done in the dressing-room with equal decision-making from the coach as it is from

the captain. Thankfully Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak and Syed Raseel made sure that England were pushed all the way till the end.

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A dejected Bangladesh captain Habibur Bashar walks off after being involved in an atrocious run-out against England during the World Cup Super Eights match at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown on Wednesday.

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TODAY'S MATCH

Team	Time	Venue
Australia v Ireland	7:30 pm	Barbados



Bangladeshi cricket fans sign a huge cricket bat at the Dhaka University Campus in the city yesterday. A local firm has sent what they say is the world's biggest cricket bat (70-foot long and eight-foot wide) on a signature tour across the nation to drum up support for the Tigers for the World Cup in the Caribbean.

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