

Tigers keep promise

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Despite a frustrating end, Habibul Bashar's men can claim that they have fulfilled their target by reaching the Cricket World Cup Super Eights. It was a promise the Tigers had made before leaving the country.

No doubt, Bangladesh cricket has taken a step forward by entering the second round in the game's showpiece event for the first time and their great wins against India and South Africa have enhanced their reputation in the cricketing fraternity.

During a two-month long tourney of the Caribbean, which was also a new experience for the boys, the Tigers gave the country's cricket crazy fans some good reasons to smile after winning seven matches out of 13 inclusive of the triangular series and the build-up matches.

The youthful Bangladesh team first served up a warning when they handed a two-wicket defeat to semifinalists New Zealand in a warm-up game to emerge as a 'feared side' in the event.

Bangladesh carried their pre-tournament success into the tournament proper and stunned favourites India in their very first match with a superb five-wicket victory, which virtually eliminated their next-door neighbours from the meet.

Then came a 67-run victory against top-ranked South Africa, their only success in six second round games, which simply forced their critics to have new thoughts about Bangladesh, who gave the impression that they can win any match of their own standing.

Despite all these success stories, there are concerns over the way they lost matches, especially

some second round defeats that were as pathetic as their wins were glorious.

Why did Bangladesh fail to sign off the tournament in the right way? The answer is simple: their poor batting performance.

If their 74-run defeat to ICC associate members Ireland was heartbreaking, then the humiliating 99-run defeat to the wounded hosts West Indies simply spoiled their party.

It would be not be exaggerating if it was said that what Bangladesh have achieved in the tournament was mainly because of the brilliant efforts by the bowlers. No doubt Mohammad Ashraful's epic 87-run knock against South Africa and an explosive 51 by young left-hander Tamim Iqbal were the knocks to remember but as a whole, the Tigers' batting was disappointing.

There are clear evidences that the batsmen have hardly come out of the same old chronic disease under outgoing coach Dav Whatmore's four-year guidance.

The most frustrating was the batting of captain Bashar, who agonisingly failed to lead his side from the front to endanger his one-day career. The 34-year old, the most successful captain of the country, scored just 105 runs in eight innings looking for the most part a tired man, a far cry from his heady days.

Ace batsman Mohammad Ashraful was the highest scorer with 216 runs from nine innings but the way he got out in the last couple of matches raised the questions whether he has yet to realise his potential.

Young left-hander Shakib Al Hasan seemed to be a solution for the inconsistent batting but he failed to justify his reputation despite scoring two half centuries in an aggregate of 202 in nine innings.

The top-order's misery continued as Aftab Ahmed also cut a sorry

figure, making 128 in nine innings, Tamim notching 175 in nine games and Mushfiqur Rahim aggregating 131 in eight innings.

Last but not the least, the problem of the opening pair remained unsolved. It seems that the team's think-tank had no clue and followed a wrong policy for the last couple of years.

Shahriar Nafees, who passed the 1,000-run mark in the last calendar, simply lost his touch and had to be replaced after making 31 runs in six matches. His replacement Javed Omar scored 55 in three games.

The way the management frequently changed the batting order, perhaps, also dented the confidence of the batters.

On the other hand bowlers did an excellent job, especially the left-arm spin trio who was part of all nine matches, became the talk of the tournament.

Abdur Razzak led the table with 13 wickets, followed by pace duo Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (9) and Syed Rasel (8 in 7 games) and fellow spinners Mohammad Rafique (8) and Shakib (7).

Now if anyone wants to find a real Tiger from the slot it would be definitely none other than Mashrafe, dubbed the Narail Express, who showed the world that he has got the ability and heart to light up the cricketing fraternity.

A man, who has gone through surgeries on both knees, was not only at his best during his four-wicket brash against the Indians but also showed his character in every game with bat or ball.

What the country needs is more Mashrafe-like Tigers to help them pass future 'mettle' detectors'.



PHOTO: AFP

Australia captain Ricky Ponting slogs-sweeps one for a boundary during his side's Super Eights match of the World Cup against New Zealand at the Grenada National Stadium in St George's on Friday.

Bashar looking forward

INTERNET, undated



Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar was left to rue another batting collapse as they finished their World Cup campaign with a 99-run defeat by West Indies.

"I think we needed to adjust to the bounce a little bit. We don't play on such quick and bouncy pitches that much but as we are playing national level we needed to learn quickly. We did not learn from our mistakes and again lost too many early wickets," he said at the post-match briefing.

Though he didn't forget to mention some good individual performances, "Mohammad Ashraful is one who batted well in most of the games. Shakib Al Hasan has impressed us. Young Tamim Iqbal has shown that in this tournament he has the ability to dominate the bowlers". And he gave full marks to his bowlers, especially Mashrafe and Razzak, for their whole-hearted effort throughout the tournament.

When asked about his own poor batting performances, he wasn't shy of taking the blame, "I should not give any excuse for not performing well. When you are leading a team there is extra pressure and you have to cope with it. Every captain goes

through that kind of pressure."

However he stopped short of any clear-cut answer on how long he plans to carry on, "I'll think about it when I get back home. Definitely I want to play Test cricket for a few more years but I need to think about my one-day career."

For the time being, the Bangladesh captain seems satisfied with his team's performances and is looking positively

towards the upcoming series against India.

"I believe we can take a lot of positives from this World Cup. I think the other teams respect us a lot more these days and they know now that Bangladesh can beat them. For us this tournament has given us the belief that we can beat big teams. It is one step forward for us," concluded Bashar.

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Woolmer inquiry postponed

BBCONLINE, undated

The inquest into the death of Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer has been postponed because of "significant developments" in the case.

Woolmer was found dead in his Kingston hotel on 18 March, the day after his side lost to Ireland in the World Cup.

The inquest was set for 23 April but has now been delayed after recent, undisclosed findings.

"The coroner has been advised there are recent and significant developments," the Jamaican justice ministry said.

"These new developments are critical to the progress and the eventual result of the investigation."

The results of the new findings will determine whether the inquest will be held at a later date, the statement went on to say.

It is believed the ex-England batsman was strangled.

Police probing Woolmer's murder had sent CCTV images to Scotland Yard for further consideration.

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BANGLADESH TOUR PARTY ANNOUNCED India tinker with flops

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

India's cricket selectors on Friday dropped five World Cup flops, including veterans Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly, for next month's one-day series in Bangladesh.

Bowlers Harbhajan Singh, Ajit Agarkar and Irfan Pathan were the other casualties in an expected shake-up following India's first round exit from the World Cup.

Tendulkar and Ganguly were, however, selected for the two Test matches that follow the three one-day internationals on the 23-day tour of Bangladesh starting on May 10.

Veteran leg-spinner Anil Kumble, who quit one-day cricket after the World Cup, was also picked for the Tests.

Tendulkar, the most successful limited-overs batsman in history with 14,847 runs and 41 centuries, managed just 210 runs in nine of his

last 10 one-day innings.

The Mumbai batsman, who turns 34 next Tuesday, had scores of seven, 57 not out and zero during the disappointing World Cup campaign.

Chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar insisted both Tendulkar and Ganguly were "rested", saying they will be considered for the tour of England in July.

"We just want to give them a break, they are definitely not out of contention for the future," he told reporters after the selection meeting here.

India, the 1983 champions and 2003 finalists, lost to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to bow out in the preliminary stage of the tournament in the Caribbean.

The selectors, ordered by the cricket board to pick a young team for the Bangladesh tour, named uncapped 21-year-old Bengal batsman Manoj Tewari in the 15-man one-day squad led by Rahul Dravid.

Young leg-spinner Piyush Chawla, left-arm seamer Rudra

Pratap Singh, off-spinner Ramesh Powar and seasoned batsman Dinesh Mongia were also picked for the one-dayers.

Aggressive opener Virender Sehwag was retained for the one-day matches despite scoring just 270 runs in his last 10 matches, but was sacked from the Test squad.

Mumbai's promising left-arm spinner, Rajesh Powar, will join Kumble and Powar in the three-pronged spin attack for the Test matches.

Former Test star-turned-commentator Ravi Shastri will be interim coach for the tour as officials search for a replacement for Greg Chappell, who did not extend his two-year tenure after the World Cup.

The first two one-dayers will be played in Dhaka on May 10 and 12 followed by the third in the port city of Chittagong on May 15.

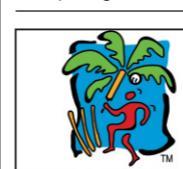
The Test matches will be held in

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WEST INDIES V ENGLAND

All set for a fitting farewell

AFP, Bridgetown



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