

Still a long way to go

SPORTS REPORTER

Idea CUP 2010
WITTE BIRLA GROUP

At the end of a memorable year everybody was looking forward to see how the Tigers transform their form in a new year with the fact that the challenge is much bigger than the year gone by. The number of wins itself shows how successful 2009 was for the Tigers but it was appropriately foretold that it would be a tough challenge for Shakib Al Hasan's men to make everyone believe in the New Year that they are in the right track on terms of not only improvement but also winning matches. And their performance in the first assignment of the New Year in the Idea Cup tri-nation tournament gave a glimpse of how big the challenge is.

In 2009, the Tigers' real strength was hardly reflected. Their success came against Zimbabwe and a depleted West Indies and Bangladesh slow bowlers played the key role behind the staggering success against these sides. In the last year Bangladesh could not get the true impression about the changes of approach in the 50-overs cricket after the very much presence of the new-born Twenty20 cricket.

But without any doubt their battle against two formidable opponents -- India and Sri Lanka-- in the tri-nation tournament have provided ample indications of where they are now and where their problems actually lie. As soon as they are able to fix these problems, they will make sure that they will be able to survive in the coming challenges.

Soon after the completion of the tri-nation tourney, Bangladesh have to shift their focus on the two-match Test series against India which will start from January 17 at Chittagong and after that they will fly for New Zealand to play one Test and three one-day internationals. Next up they will be involved in a two-match Test series and three-match one-day series against the in-form England side at home in February-

March in a very busy schedule.

Even though Bangladesh lost all four matches and hardly made any resistance against the two sub-continent opponents the picture was not all that gloomy in the ongoing tournament. Nothing could have been better if the Tigers were able to pull off at least one success which would have been something to cheer about.

The most encouraging part of their performance in the tournament was their consistent batting but still in the end they definitely can understand that this improvement is not enough for modern day's one-day cricket where no run is safe.

It was refreshing to see almost all the top order batsmen get amongst runs with the stiff task ahead and the team scored close to 250 in every match which was something new for Bangladesh cricket no matter how good the pitches were for batting. The last year ended with a real headache; problem in the opening slot but the performance of two southpaw batsmen in Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes seemed to give some relief for the team management while there is a batsman like Shahriar Nafees as back-up.

The way former national skipper Mohammad Ashraful changed his batting style definitely made some sense and Shakib Al Hasan showed that he is in the right track to maintain his form.

There was one disappointment that none could achieve the three-digit magic figure on a very flat track at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur although it was very much possible for Ashraful and Shakib, who made 85 in the last game against India on Monday.

Among all the batsmen it was Mahmudullah Riyad who was outstanding with the willow as he made 193 runs in four games. The right-hander's ability of milking the singles to build up the innings as well as power of hitting hard

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Young India batsman Virat Kohli sets off for a run on way to scoring an unbeaten 102, his second century, during the final league match of the Idea Cup against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

U-19s warm up well

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While the national team bowed out of the Idea Cup with their fourth defeat in the triangular tournament, the Bangladesh Under-19 team got their pre-World Cup campaign off to the best possible start, winning the first practice match against hosts New Zealand at Lincoln Green Park

in Christchurch yesterday. The young Tigers beat the hosts by 36 runs on Duckworth-Lewis method. Bangladesh skipper Mahmudul Hasan won the toss and sent the opposition in. And three of the top four Kiwi batsmen got fifties but no one could convert those into big ones as Bangladesh got wickets at the right times. Paceman Kamrul Islam was the most impressive with

figures of 2 for 31 in nine overs. The run out of Corey Anderson proved to be a vital blow as he was going great guns. Corey scored 62 runs off just 49 balls including two sixes and seven boundaries, but Saikat Ali effected the run out to stem the run flow of New Zealand innings. In the end the hosts reached 242 for six in their stipulated 45 overs.

Bangladesh got off to the worst possible start in their chase when they lost opener Anamul Haque off the very first delivery of the innings. New Zealand pacer Jimmy Neesham's ball got through the defences of Anamul. The other opener Amit Majumder and next man Saikat Ali weathered the storm and laid the foundation.

The two put on 99 runs before Amit was dismissed on 47 with three massive sixes. Saikat played an aggressive knock of 72 off just 61 deliveries that included 11 boundaries and one maximum. It was easy work since then as Mominul Haque added 66 valuable runs and skipper Mahmudul Hasan remained unbeaten on 37 as they looked to be on course for an easy chase. With the score on 229 for 4 in 39.1 overs, set in rain. And it didn't cease taking the game to be decided by the Duckworth-Lewis method which resulted in Bangladesh's victory by 36 runs.

Bangladesh play their second and last warm-up game today against Australia at Elmwood Park in Christchurch before the tournament kicks off on Friday.

PHOTO: COURTESY



Bangladesh Under-19 batsman Mominul Haque returns to the dressing room after scoring an unbeaten 66 in their first practice match against New Zealand at Lincoln Green Park in Christchurch yesterday.

U-16 cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Bandutia High School became champions in Manikganj Zone of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers U-16 National Cricket Tournament with an 80-run victory over Manikganj Government Boys' High School at Shahid Miraj-Tapan Stadium on Monday.

Bandutia batted first and made 200 for 8 with Mehedi scoring highest 53 runs off 79 balls, Monwar adding a run-a-ball 46 and Al-Amin striking 21. Sohan and Ishan took three wickets each for Manikganj. In reply, Manikganj Govt.

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BANGLADESH-INDIA SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH	R	B	4s	6s
Tamim c Tyagi b Nehra	17	31	3	0
Imrul c Kohli b Tyagi	9	8	2	0
Ashraful b Sreesanth	4	9	1	0
Raqibul run out (Yuvraj)	28	46	3	0
Shakib c Dhoni b Nehra	85	97	8	1
Mushfiq c Raina b Yuvraj	7	18	1	0
Mahmudullah not out	64	80	5	1
Naeem not out	22	14	2	1
Extras: (lb-2, w-6, nb-3)	11			
Total: (For 6 wickets in 50 overs)	247			
Did not bat: Razzak, Rasel, Shafiq.				
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-15, 3-60, 4-67, 5-95, 6-201				
BOWLER	O	M	R	W
Tyagi	6	2	24	1
Sreesanth	8	0	53	1
Nehra	10	1	58	2
Mishra	10	0	54	0
Yuvraj	10	1	33	1
Jadeja	6	1	23	0
INDIA	R	B	4s	6s
Karthik c Mushfiq b Shafiq	34	39	3	1
Gambhir b Naeem	41	46	5	0
Kohli not out	102	95	11	0
Yuvraj lbw b Naeem	13	25	1	0
Dhoni c Imrul b Shakib	32	35	3	0
Raina not out	18	18	1	0
Extras: (lb-6, w-3)	9			
Total: (For 4 wickets in 43 overs)	249			
Did not bat: Mishra, Jadeja, Sreesanth, Tyagi, Nehra.				

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Shahriar finds his place in Test side

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Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is yet to be match fit as the national selectors on Monday announced a 14-member squad for the two-Test series against India keeping Shakib Al Hasan as captain and wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim as his deputy.

"Mashrafe himself is not ready to play the Test matches, but we are hopeful that he will be a part of the team on the New Zealand tour because he is improving well," said chief selector Rafiqul Alam yesterday.

The Rafiqul Alam-led selection panel made few changes on the team from the one that toured West Indies last July as wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain and left-handed batsman Mehrab Hossain have been left out.

On the other hand, left-arm seamer Syed Rasel, left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak, Naeem Islam and Aftab Ahmed failed to make it to the Test side from the one-day team which played the ongoing Idea Cup tri-nation tournament.

The first Test starts at Chittagong from January 17 while the second match begins at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur from January 24.

The Test team includes four openers in Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Kayes, Shahriar Nafees and Zunaed Siddiqui, who was dropped from the one-day side due to poor form.

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NCL crisis over

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Top first-class cricketers have backed from their stance to agree to take part in the upcoming National Cricket League, scheduled to get underway on Thursday.

"After the announcement of the Bangladesh Cricket Board on December 31, we discussed the matter with the cricketers for several times and all first-class players criticised the BCB's statement as well as its stance. But putting the financial matters aside and for the greater interest of the sport, we have decided to take part in the league," said a Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh press release, signed by its president Naimur Rahman and general secretary Debaroto Paul yesterday.

"Taking the financial crisis of the board into account, the cricketers have unanimously agreed to take match fees and allowances as per the 2008-09

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Fielding causes new concern for Tigers

BISHWAJIT ROY

Idea CUP 2010
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A new headache added to the woes of the Bangladesh team management after their six-wicket defeat in the last league match against India in the Idea Cup tri-nation tournament at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Bowling was a cause for concern for the Tigers in the first three games, but things got little better in the last game yesterday, especially rookie paceman Shafiqur Islam got accolades from both his skipper Shakib Al Hasan and India's star bat Virat Kohli who guided his team to the easy win with an unbeaten 102, but poor efforts in the fielding in the last match has really become a cause for concern for team.

Mohammad Ashraful spilled two easy catches while Mushfiqur Rahim missed an easy stumping chance which helped the young Kohli to reach three digits in the tournament.

"I wouldn't thank him [Ashraful] because it's part of the game but I must say I was lucky to make the hundred. I'm very much pleased with the century because I missed the opportunity in the first game. And you know I always try to grab the chances," said the stylish right-hander in the post-match briefing.

The young batter also heaped praise on young Bangladesh paceman Shafiqur Islam despite the fact that the right-arm bowler was most expensive by conceding 63 runs in 10 overs with only one scalp to his credit. "It is really hard to bowl in this kind of condition," said Kohli.

Bangladesh captain Shakib also showered praises on the 20-year-old paceman from Bogra.

"He was much, much better today than the first game. But I believe he has got the potential to cement his place in the team and we are really hopeful about him," said Shakib who also expressed his satisfaction over the bowler's performance in the last match.

"The performance of Razzak vai [left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak] could have been much better but I must say our bowling performance was not at all bad in the match. Actually the important thing is how much we can learn from our mistakes," he said.

Shakib also said that their target was eighty per cent achieved in the tournament as the batsmen found their feet to score 250-plus runs on three occasions out of four.

"We have to improve a lot in our pace bowling and fielding. Today's fielding was really disappointing, but I must say we achieved eighty per cent of our target from this tournament because it was not so common in our cricket history that we scored 250 or more runs in three consecutive matches," said a confident Shakib.

Man-of-the-match Kohli was also impressed with the performances of Bangladesh and said that the hosts were little bit unlucky in the tournament.

"They were little bit unlucky because they fielded second in every single match which was not so easy in this kind of condition. I think the toss is still a big factor in the tournament and it will also play a big role in the final as well," he said.

Muktijoddha's maiden win

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Muktijoddha Sangsad tasted their first win in the Bangladesh League when the Reds came from behind to beat Arambagh Krira Sangha 3-2 at Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Muktijoddha, who conceded five defeats and drew one in their previous six games, looked down the barrel when veteran striker Alfaz Ahmed struck for Arambagh in the 36th minute.

But the Reds staged a spectacular turnaround in the goal-filled second-half with their shaven-headed striker Rokonzaman Kanchan restoring parity in the 50th minute.

Azmul Hossain Bidyut put Muktijoddha ahead, striking in the 66th minute, before Ghanaian Furaed Ali added the third in the first minute of the stoppage time.

However, Arambagh's Kenyan striker Nicodemus Anunda, who struck the league's first hat-trick against Chittagong Mohammedan, scored his fourth goal a minute after Furaed's strike.

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TT, badminton eye silver

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Bangladesh Badminton Federation and Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation have set their sights on silver, something they had never achieved in the history of the South Asian Games that started its journey from Nepal in 1984.

It was expressed during press briefings of the two fledgling federations at the newly-built Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) Bhaban yesterday, 18 days before the kick-off of the 11th SA Games to be staged in Bangladesh.

"The players have been training since January and they got a chance to judge their performance during the Asian Table Tennis Championship in India a few months ago. Having defeated Nepal, Laos and Jordan, Bangladesh finished 16th out of 21 participants and that's why we are expecting a silver medal in the men's team event this time," hoped Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTF) general secretary ATM Shamsul Alam.

He admitted that India are still the best in the region while announcing the final squad. Alam's bold assertion

however got soured a bit when the players, who were also present at the briefing, brought allegations against the federation high-ups for turning a blind eye on the two non-performing coaches of the team.

Hafizur Rahman and Saidul Haq Sadi were appointed coaches to prepare the players, but the players termed Hafizur as 'unskilled'

while called Sadi 'slippery' for frequently ducking the training schedule.

"There was nothing new to learn from coach Hafizur Rahman and we had requested the federation to appoint coaches likes Linu [Jobera Rahman] and Kochi [Nasimul Hasan] but they did not listen to our request," said Moumita Alam Rumi. She however said that they

learn a lot under Chinese coach Sun Yi in the last two months.

"At present, we can't say anything about medals. I could have ensured you about the medal had we got this coach from the beginning," said another paddler, Sonam Sultana Soma.

"The training under the federation was not hundred

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Bangladesh Badminton Federation general secretary Jubaidur Rahman Rana makes a photo while announcing the team for the SA Games at the Bangladesh Olympic Association headquarters yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY