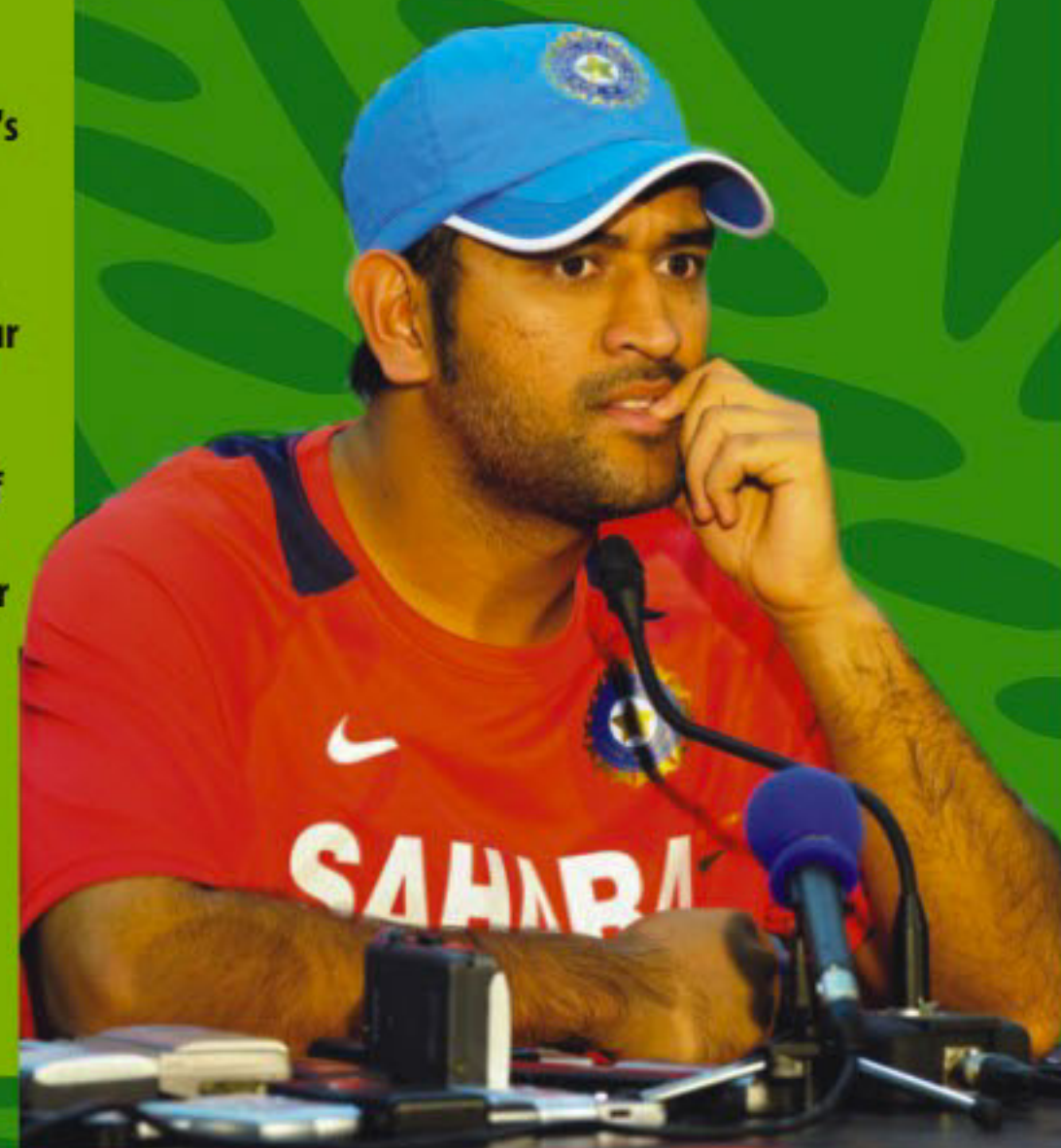


Forgetting the past

Dhoni remained bullish about the team's chances and shrugged off the past and hinted that India are more concerned about themselves than the opposition, who trounced them in Port-of-Spain four years ago. But when asked about Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's absence, given the amount of attention the paceman has received, Dhoni's response was funny, but only for a few. "At least I know that he won't be the man-of-the-match tomorrow (Saturday)," he remarked, referring to the two man-of-the-match awards Mashrafe received in both of Bangladesh's wins over India in 2004 and 2007.



PHOTOS: STAR

Today might be the biggest game of their lives but both captain Shakib Al Hasan (L) and opener Tamim Iqbal cut relaxed figures during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

'Just another game for us'

BISHWAJIT ROY

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan tried to tone down the hype of today's opening match of the World Cup, terming it as just another game in international cricket. While the Bangladesh perspective of the game has been billed as an attempt to 'repeat history' and the Indian one is being dubbed a 'revenge mission' by one of their own, the Tigers skipper was not ready to go overboard with excitement.

"It's just another game and we need to play our own game," said Shakib, the youngest captain of the tournament, during the crowded press conference yesterday prior to today's battle against the tournament's hot favourites India.

But the Bangladesh skipper was very clear about his target: "We want to win this match."

The expectation is sky high with the Tigers after their recent success and with the fact that they have beaten their mighty opponents four years back in West Indies, so there is a chance that they might break down under the weight of expectations. The question was also raised whether the huge home crowd will create any pressure, but a confident Shakib thought otherwise.

"It was a great feeling when I received the rousing applause from the crowd while riding the rickshaw in the opening ceremony. Believe me, I got emotional and it's something I will remember for the rest of my life. I don't think the high expectation and presence of the crowd will be a pressure for us, rather it will inspire us. And the guys are old enough to cope with the pressure," said Shakib, dismissing the 'pressure-factor'.

"It's very nice that the crowd will be behind us and cheer for us. It's fantastic the way the people are engaged with the excitement of the World Cup. It's now a totally different city where people even come to see the new-look stadium at night. The people are feeling excitement but not the players," he added.

The world's No 1 all-rounder also said that the win against India in the 2007 World Cup will inspire them to play better cricket against this stronger side.

"Definitely we had a very good time in the 2007 World Cup in West Indies and the win against India was a memorable one. I think nothing could have been better than playing against India in the opening match and it's a very good idea to play against a team like India in the first game," said Shakib.

He said that it would be a good encounter if they can play their natural game and can make a good start whether they are bowling or batting first. "We need to do the basics right and make sure that the processes are okay. We should keep in mind that we have to play six games," said Shakib, praising the Indian performance in the last few years.

In the day-night affair, the toss will always play an important role but Shakib believed that it would not be a big issue. "Definitely the toss plays a vital role but I think the dew will not be a big factor in the match and that's why the toss will not affect anything," he observed.

Shakib didn't give any indication about the final eleven but Bangladesh are expected to go by the book.

The question is about whether Mohammad Ashraful or Rokibul Hasan will play the match and the latter is most likely the candidate as Ashraful miserably failed in the practice match against Pakistan.

Shahriar Nafees, Sohrawardi Shuvo and Nazmul Hossain are likely to be left out from the squad.

LIKELY TEAMS

BANGLADESH: Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Tamim Iqbal (vice-captain), Imrul Kayes, Junaed Siddiqui, Rokibul Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Naeem Islam, Mahmudullah Riyad, Abdur Razzak, Shafiqul Islam, Rubel Hossain.

INDIA: Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain & wicketkeeper), Virender Sehwag, Sachin Tendulkar, Gautam Gambhir, Virat Kohli, Yuvraj Singh, Yusuf Pathan, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Ashish Nehra, Munaf Patel.

BANGLADESH V INDIA ENCOUNTERS

	Played	Won	Lost
Overall	22	2	20
In Bangladesh	13	1	12

Highest runs: Gautam Gambhir (542 runs)
Most wickets: Mohammad Rafique (18 wickets)
Bangladesh has a 100% record in World Cup matches against India.

Nonchalant Dhoni

MOHAMMAD ISAM



ICC Cricket World Cup 2011

India's record in opening games of the World Cup is 0-2 against them. In the 2007 World Cup they made an inglorious exit from the first round of the tournament. But for the last three years, India have been the team in form and is considered by most as the best one-day outfit in the world currently.

The last piece of information can be reason enough to rule the roost and set the ball rolling in a way only they can but if humility is hard to come by, maybe a look at the first two facts could give Mahendra Singh Dhoni some food for thought.

In their first-ever World Cup match in 1975, India were crushed by 202 runs and four years later, a Gordon Greenidge century gave them very little to talk about in the opening game of 1979 in Edgbaston.

And in the last World Cup, India did not play the tournament opener but still lost their first game to the Tigers before bowing out of the tournament through a heart-breaking loss to Sri Lanka.

But history hardly bothers the India captain and on the face of it, neither does a lack of punctuality. He was more than an hour late for the pre-match press conference, and his nonchalance was met with incredulity among the waiting press corp.

Of course there wasn't a hint of apology from the ICC

(who set the 1:30pm start) or Dhoni. Bizarrely (or what a few might call poetic justice) the press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was the most chaotic among the many held since February 9, Dhoni's voice being inaudible to the electronic media standing at the back.

Despite all this, he remained bullish about the team's chances and shrugged off the past and hinted that India are more concerned about themselves than the opposition, who trounced them in Port-of-Spain four years ago.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

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Match Bangladesh v India

Time 2:30pm

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