



The Bangladesh team tried to laugh off the disappointment of the defeat against India on the previous day when the three performers (L-R) Shikib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Rubel Hossain posed for photographs at the hotel lobby yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

OPINION

Between a rock and a hard place

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

Much of the debate surrounding the fall-out of Bangladesh's loss to India in the opening match of the World Cup on Saturday has centered on the decision of captain Shakib Al Hasan to field first after winning the toss.

The rationale behind the thinking of those who opposed the captain's choice was that given India's behemoth of a batting line-up, handing them first use of the wicket would be folly because they could have put the game out of reach in the first innings itself.

It is a reasonable argument and one that was vindicated by what transpired, as Virender Sehwag plundered 175 in India's mammoth 370 to all but seal the result in the first two hours in front of a raucous home crowd.

So dominant were the team in blue that by the time Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes came out for first strike of the second innings the game was well and truly up.

But while it is easy to blame everything on the toss, it is sometimes worth it to consider the thought process behind the decision of the captain and his management team.

As many have suggested, Shakib and Jamie Siddons must have been swayed by the statistics at the venue where teams batting second have almost always seemed to have an advantage, due to the seemingly small but not inconsiderable factor of the dew.

In truth, Shakib and Siddons were probably even more affected by the result of a game played at the same venue a little over a year ago.

On January 7, 2010 Bangladesh faced India in the third match of a tri-nation tournament also involving Sri Lanka. What is interesting to see is the similarity in personnel of both sides. Most of the members of the squad who played Saturday's World Cup game were also around in that encounter.

On that occasion too, Shakib called the coin correctly.

That time though, he chose to bat and his decision was seemingly validated as the Tigers put up (for them) a massive 296 off 50 overs. And that was not all. Tidy fielding and good bowling had the Indian's reeling at 51 for 3 at one stage, before Virat Kohli and MS Dhoni took the match away from Bangladesh with some fine batting aided by the inability of the Bangladeshi spinners to grip the ball properly due to the dew.

The fall-out from that game was almost as intense as this World Cup encounter.

Shakib was posed a dizzying array of questions and was heavily criticized for choosing to bat when the dew was such a defining factor.

On that occasion, The Daily Star called it "a surprise decision" because "win the toss, bowl, win the game has almost become a motto in the tournament due to the dew factor."

Nor were they the only newspaper to condemn Shakib. The Daily Prothom Alo were also scathing while Cricinfo said that "even 296 wasn't enough to counter an in-form batting unit and a familiar foe called dew."

So, not far removed from that day, Saturday's press conference and Sunday's headlines must have been for Shakib, a case of 'damned if I do, damned if I don't.'

The fear is that with so much negatives directed at him, Shakib might be influenced enough to take the wrong decision in a match where the stakes are higher.

Bangladesh need to win three games to reach the quarterfinals. India, thankfully, was not one of those games. At this point, we must not lose focus. Ireland await next, and if Shakib does manage to choose the coin the right way in that game, he should not hesitate to tempt the wrath of the press and bat second.

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Cheema's aspiration

AFP, Hambantota

Swashbuckling Canadian batsman Rizwan Cheema said Sunday he is a huge fan of Pakistan great Imran Khan, setting his sights on emulating the World Cup-winning skipper.

Imran, who lifted the World Cup for Pakistan in 1992, was one of the world's top all-rounders in a golden era alongside Ian Botham of England, India's Kapil Dev and Richard Hadlee of New Zealand.

After retiring from cricket Imran went into politics and heads his own Tehrik-e-Insaaf (Movement for Justice) party in Pakistan.

"The only hero in my life is Imran, since I was born. I have met him but a very basic interaction. His captaincy, approach to the game and the way he presents himself," Pakistan-born Cheema said.

"Whenever I watch him on television and the way he speaks, I am enamoured and want to emulate him if I ever get a chance," said Cheema, who admitted Canada could not compete with cricket's big guns at the World Cup.

"We are just working hard for almost a year now preparing for this event," said

'Bat if you win toss'

REAZUR RAHMAN ROHAN



When Shakib Al Hasan won the toss, the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium erupted in cheer, but soon there was a short pause when the crowd heard that he chose to bowl first. The decision started to go pear-shaped from the very first delivery that Shafiqul Islam bowled, which was hit for a boundary.

India piled up a massive 370 runs against Bangladesh in the first match of this World Cup. Winning the toss, the Bangladesh captain decided to bowl on a pitch that looked very much batting friendly, and thus raised the question: WHY?

The whole country is still debating whether Shakib took the right decision of bowling first. Obviously there was a plan that did not work. Shakib reasoned dew to be a factor later, but with due respect, that proved to be a fatal mistake.

According to former captain Roquibul Hassan, "When the match started at 2:30pm, the weather was hot and the pitch was placid. A team should always bat first in a day-night match because it's always hard to chase a big total under lights."

A similar response came from Khaled Mashud, who played two World Cups for Bangladesh in 1999 and 2003. "The toss was important, and after winning it I think we should have batted first on the flat pitch," he opined. He also added that, "India have a strong batting line-up, and asking them to bat first was not right."

The Tigers' think-tank made the decision to chase, and on the day it went thoroughly wrong. The bowlers looked quite nervous as they never maintained a consistent line and

length, thus giving away runs. "The bowlers did not do justice to that decision. The part-timers [Naem Islam and Mahamudullah Riyad] tried to bowl flat, rather than trying some variations, which made it easy for the batsmen to score," said Roquibul.

An India win was on the cards, but all felt there would have been a chance for Bangladesh to win had they batted first and set a target in front of the home crowd. But when the plan was to chase, Mashud feels the batting should have been a bit stronger keeping in mind that India have every chance of setting a big target. "[Mohammad] Ashraf is an important player and he should have played the big match. He is that type of a player who has the capability of scoring more than balls faced."

Keeping the quarterfinals in mind, the Tigers' next match against Ireland is a must win. The first requirement for Bangladesh would be to avenge their 2007 loss these opponents in the same manner as India did on Saturday.

Both former cricketers think that Bangladesh should bat first if they win the toss. "Our batsmen are in good touch as they already put a total of 280-plus against India, so they should definitely bat first and put the Irish under pressure," said the former wicketkeeper.

While Roquibul says, "Bangladesh bowling is primarily based on spin. If you win the toss, bat first and put up a good score on the board. Then the strategy for the bowlers should be to slow things down for the Irish batsmen."

As Shakib and company take the field on February 25 against Ireland, 160 million people will once again be behind the team, looking for the victory -- their first World Cup win on home soil.

Prior learnt it from Mushie

AFP, Nagpur

Matt Prior paid tribute Sunday to the influence of former Pakistan leg-break bowler Mushtaq Ahmed after being labelled England's best player of spin by teammate Stuart Broad.

Prior's return to the middle-order from an opener's berth for England's World Cup campaign has largely been seen in the context of Kevin Pietersen's promotion to partnering captain Andrew Strauss at the top of the order.

But England are convinced moving Prior down the order is a positive move for their wicketkeeper, as it is in the middle overs of a one-day innings where slow bowling will come into play.

Prior played alongside Mushtaq at Sussex where the leg-spinner twice took more than a hundred first-class wickets to guide the south coast side to the 2003 and 2006 County Championship titles.

Although Mushtaq retired three years ago, he was subsequently employed as England's spin bowling coach, renewing a relationship that the attacking Prior said was pivotal to his development against slow bowling.

SPORTS POLL

Should the WC opening ceremony be any different?

Yes 64.5%

No 35.5%

TOTAL VOTES: 110

WEEKLY QUESTION

Where did Bangladesh go wrong against India?

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STAR Sports/ STAR Cricket
ICC Cricket World Cup
Australia v Zimbabwe
Live from 3:00pm

Referees awarded badges

SPORTS REPORTER

As many as 13 match officials were handed over their FIFA badges at the Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday.

Five of them are referees: Taiyeb Hasan, Azad Rahman, Bharat Chandra, Abdul Hannan Miron and Moinul Islam while the rest are assistant referees. They are: Azizur Rahman Bablu, Amanat Halder, Mahbubur Rahman, Abdul Munaf Sarkar, Aminul Islam Ripon, Tofazzal Hossain Bachchu and Harunur Rashid.

BFF's senior vice president Salam Murshedi disbursed the badges among the match officials while chairman of referees committee Bashir Ahmed and vice president Manzoor Hossain Malu were also present.

WI duo given green signal

AFP, New Delhi

West Indies duo Kirk Edwards and Devon Thomas have officially been cleared by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to replace injured World Cup duo Adrian Barath and Carlton Baugh.

Edwards, a right-handed Barbadian batsman, and Thomas, the Antigua wicketkeeper/batsman, left the Caribbean on Saturday and are scheduled to join the squad in India on Monday.

West Indies' opening match will be against South Africa at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium here on Thursday.



Sri Lankan were in jubilant mood as they welcomed their first match of the World Cup against Canada by waving flags at the Suriyawewa Mahinda Rajapakse Stadium in the Hambantota yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Cricket falls new frontier

AFP, Hambantota



Thousands welcomed the World Cup to Hambantota on Sunday, and in a land of ancient temples and leopards, even an elephant slowly ambled along to mark the occasion.

Fans had bought their tickets well in advance of Sri Lanka's clash with Canada at the 35,000 capacity Mahinda Rajapakse Stadium which was hosting international cricket for the first time.

"I am elated. Two World Cup matches coming to our part of the country is a double delight," said Nuwan Tharanga, who travelled 50 kilometres on public transport from Beliatta with his son Thishanta.

The match opened amidst deafening music, while the official World Cup song was presented in Sinhalese.

It was then that a wild elephant emerged from the forests to peer curiously over the stadium fence.

"It's historic and because of the World Cup our province now has new roads and other facilities which will go a long way in the development of this part of the country," added Tharanga.

The Bundala National Park, Yala National Park -- with the highest concentration of leopards in the world -- and the temples at Kataragama are major tourist attractions in an area which was devastated by the 2004 tsunami.

"I arranged my tour three months ago," said Tim Mathiason, from Canberra, Australia.

"First my son and I visited all the parks and now we have tickets for both the matches in Hambantota, it's a very good stadium."

The ground, named after the country's president, was built for the World Cup at a cost of around eight million dollars.

Rajapakse was expected to inaugurate the stadium, which will also host the Pakistan-Kenya match on Wednesday, later Sunday.

On the way to the stadium, there were stalls selling national flags and blue and yellow Sri Lankan team shirts, going for 10 to 20 dollars.

"It's great fun and a carnival-like atmosphere," said Sudesh Kumar, accompanied by his wife Chathrani Dilukshi, who both arrived by bike from nearby Suriyawewa.

Despite alcohol and musical instruments being banned by the Sri

Lankan authorities, as part of a security clampdown, people were still well-equipped with drinks and trumpets.

Large numbers of police and military personnel searched vehicles, frisked spectators and confiscated any banned items.

"We had announced that alcohol, musical instruments, sharp objects, glass bottles, cans, firecrackers and smoke bombs are not permitted, and we are happy that the fans are co-operating," a police spokesman said.

People also weathered scorching 30-degree sunshine to cheer on their national team.

"I am very happy for Hambantota and I must thank the ICC (International Cricket Council) for giving us a World Cup match," said Anujadashar Karunaratna, who left home at nine in the morning from Tissamaharama to make the start of the game five and half hours later.

Most fans were expecting Sri Lanka to ease past Canada.

"Sri Lanka will easily beat Canada and I pray that they win the World Cup because the one we won in 1996 is not enough," said Dhanuka Abeyswardena, wearing a t-shirt bearing with Rajapakse's picture.