

Star SPORT

'Marriage is like football'

West Germany's 1990 World Cup winning captain Lotthar Matthaus equated football to being married in an interview with Bild on Saturday to celebrate his 50th birthday which he celebrates on Monday. "Marriage is like a football match," said Matthaus, who is looking at a fourth divorce as he is separated from his fourth wife 22-year-old Liliana. "In a couple like on the pitch, one never knows what will be the outcome. "It is imperative to fight and to give one's best, but it depends also a lot on one's team-mate.



DIFFERENT ANGLES: (L) Bangladesh's highest run-scorer in the 2011 World Cup Imrul Kayes shoulders arms and is bowled by an incoming delivery while (R) the man to do it, South Africa left-arm paceman Lonwabo Tsotsobe, is over the moon as he celebrates what turned out to be a man-of-the-match performance during yesterday's Group B match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

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PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

We crumbled under pressure: Shakib

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

A famous French philosopher once said that, to him, hell was other people. Shakib Al Hasan will probably never be as eloquent as Jean Paul Sartre but after yesterday he would certainly beg to differ. Because for the Bangladesh captain, hell was a harrowingly cyclical revisit of the dreadful performance against the West Indies at the same venue only two weeks earlier. Like Bill Murray in the unforgettable Groundhog Day, Shakib must have felt that he was living through a vividly familiar nightmare as the Tigers mellowed and collapsed to a startlingly low 78, just twenty more than they managed against the West Indies two weeks earlier. A return of 136 for the loss of twenty wickets in two matches at their very own "Home of Cricket" certainly repre-

sents awful value, and Shakib was understandably short of any defence when facing the press at the post-match briefing at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

To his credit, though, he did not mince his words and finally admitted that the batting had been a concern throughout the tournament.

"There are some areas where we did not do well, but especially I thought we did not do well with the bat throughout the series," he said. The revelation represented a breakthrough of sorts for the wily skipper, whose clever wordplay across the past month had managed to skirt over the issue of a brittle batting line-up that did not get going even once through the tournament.

In truth, yesterday saw a different Shakib. Gone were the cocky strut and the whiplash replies; yesterday's version was a more demure, retiring individual than the inscrutable pragmatist most have become used to.

At times he was even apologetic, particularly to the fans who had turned up hoping that their beloved Tigers could spring a surprise and make it to the quarterfinals.

"They [the fans] deserved more. We did not play well at all," he said.

"The way we have been performing for the last twelve months meant that most of the fans were expecting us to do better than we did, but we let them down and I feel sorry for them."

Shakib also assured that there were no demons on the pitch and said that it was pointless poring over small errors when you had folded for such a low total.

"Today's wicket was much better than the last one [against West Indies]. When you score 180-200 you can find mistakes, but when you are all out for 80-odd, everything is actually wrong," he said.

The all-rounder admitted that the weight of expectation might have become too much for the players to handle.

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MOHAMMAD ISAM



While the on-field World Cup has been a reasonably successful one with the Tigers gaining the expected results, the month-long appearance in the sport's biggest has been a huge learning curve for this young team.

That is, if they are willing to learn.

In truth, this has not been the best World Cup for Bangladesh when it comes to off-field issues. It should have been a calm and peaceful campaign despite the debacles (370, 58 all out, 78 all out) but what transpired has been one where a lot of things were said, correct and incorrect, sensible and careless and a tournament where some theories have been forced down the throats.

The hypothesis, among many of the same genre, that right-arm off-spinners are effective mostly against left-handed batsmen (and vice versa) is either a childish notion or part of a complicated thought process.

Also strange was captain Shakib Al Hasan's constant proclamation that there was nothing wrong with the team's batting when clearly, it was nothing to write home about. But call it his ploy to motivate Tamim Iqbal and Co or stubbornness against the media, it backfired in both regards as the batsmen failed to be inspired or anyone impressed.

Shakib's biggest mistake was obviously his insensitive behaviour in

front of the crowd after his side were bowled out against West Indies. Maybe his counter-criticism of the former players split opinions but that was Shakib hitting rock bottom.

The incidents which piled up after that defeat were unsavoury to say the least but the by-product of those have also not been anything to write home about. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has shown new levels of inertia (read unsigned players contract and media protocol guidelines) while the team management has not handled any of the successes, debacles, criticisms, reactions, etc competently.

Over the last two years, Shakib Al Hasan's approach was a refreshing change, his mix of steely determination with a carefree demeanor lauded in most circles. His fearlessness in decision-making is perhaps the best attribute of his captaincy but since he's the leader of his men, his shot-a-minute sessions with the press and his angry retort to the home crowd is not desired, his effort to alienate himself even at times absurd.

There is little doubt over his quality as a cricketer, a captain and a human being, but Shakib should take this World Cup as the perfect lesson in handling success and failure properly. Since he's a public figure and a big one at that, treading that fine line can take some doing but that is what is expected of this country's cricket captain. Though he thrives on leading by example, Shakib has to bring everyone together and preside over a

challenging year ahead for the Tigers.

He does have a few positives with him. Shafiqul Islam, Imrul Kayes and to some extent Mahmudullah Riyad and Naeem Islam have been the success stories at the World Cup for Bangladesh. This collection of performers says a lot about what went right and who went wrong since the camp for the tournament began in late January.

Privately, these four players are regarded as cool and down to earth but it doesn't take too long for success to ruin future successes and for people to be treated differently in trying times.

Consider this particular scene from training on the eve of the South Africa game: Mohammad Ashraful was all padded up and ready for a hit in the Mirpur nets. But the batsman walked out baffled after standing in one place (right next to the five nets) for more than 20 minutes without a single direction from any of those minding the session.

Ashraful was not in the reckoning for selection but there was enough reason for him to get that one hit and not be ignored that easily. He may not be pushing for a place, but any squad member deserves that much attention and respect and this haughty treatment is uncalled for.

Lots of positives are strewn between February 19 to March 19 but there remain some huge gaps to be filled both on and off the field. At this end, Shakib should once again break the barrier, and take the lead.

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TODAY'S MATCHES

Match	Time	Venue
Zimbabwe v Kenya	10:00am	Kolkata
India v West Indies	3:00pm	Chennai

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India v West Indies

West Indies appeared to have sealed their place in the last eight when they were cantering towards victory against England before they slipped up with the finishing line in sight, losing by 18 runs. The opposite, India already qualified for quarterfinal. Indian openers Virender Sehwag (327 runs) and Sachin Tendulkar (324 runs) have been very successful but the much famed middle order has not quite clicked yet, with Gautam Gambhir and Yuvraj Singh being somewhat among the runs. Indian skipper Dhoni will have to decide whether to play Suresh Raina or Yusuf Pathan. Devon Smith (212 runs) has been the most successful West Indian batsman so far, while Pollard (178 runs) has been destructive. India need to fear the classy Darren Bravo and Chris Gayle.

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