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SPORT

E-MAIL: sports@thecitizenstar.net

If you can't win, then compete

BISHWAJIT ROY



There has been something missing in the Tigers' tent this time. It may be a lack of self-belief. Prior to all their previous home series, regardless of the opposition's strength, Bangladesh have never looked as submerged as they do now in the early exchanges of the home challenge against an in-form Pakistan team. It seems that nobody in the team believes that they can beat Pakistan or even compete, especially against the tourists' versatile bowling attack.

The heavy defeat in the one-off T20 match would have only compounded the fear factor. Now only an impressive show can change the whole complexion but to do that Mushfiqur Rahim's men must give their best in the middle and show that they have the skill to handle a quality bowling attack when they start the one-day campaign with today's first day-night match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

In truth, this is a tough test for the Bangladesh batters. Without any doubt their technique and temperament will be put under the microscope during the series. Everyone will be looking on intently to see how the vulnerable opening pair and the uncertain middle-order handle the sublime bowling attack and how the local bowlers take on the challenge against a strong Pakistan batting line-up.

When it comes to issues of skill as it seems to have against Pakistan, there are no short-term remedies. What well-wishers of the team should be looking for is the Tigers trying their utmost with the tools at their disposal.

This reality was reflected when Bangladesh coach Stuart Law talked about his team's chances of competing in the series at the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"It's going to be tough. They had a very good series win against Sri Lanka and the Lankans have got some great players in their line up. We know that we have to play very good cricket to beat Pakistan. But we should be thinking that we should put and defend totals really need to team. If we then that we can't think this way.

Alredy, Tamim had scored four hundreds including his maverick 103 at

we can start emulating them would be really good," stated the Australian.

The Bangladesh coach emphasised on the basics because he knows without that his charges simply cannot survive against their mighty opponents.

"We can win a couple. We are not here to lose and not here to go into the series thinking that we can't compete. We are into the series putting our plans together and if we can stick to the plans and play good cricket, anything is possible. And if we can stick to the basics, we play good cricket," he said when asked whether his team expect at least one win in the series like on previous occasions.

After the defeat in the T20 match, the wicket in Mirpur became a point of discussion but Law said: "You can't say it was difficult to bat on as I think we should start to learn to play on these sorts of wickets. We have to be able to score runs under difficult conditions to be able to beat good teams around the world."

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Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (L) shakes hands with Pakistan captain Misbahul Haq after a discussion with him during training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. They will play the first of three ODIs here today.

PHOTO: STAR

What's eating Tamim?

MOHAMMAD ISAM

On this day last year, it was happy tidings for Tamim Iqbal.

He was returning to the national team after wrist surgery during the 4-0 thrashing of New Zealand which he had missed. Having played much of 2010 with pain, the first ODI series against Zimbabwe was the icing on his run-laden cake.

Already, Tamim had scored four hundreds including his maverick 103 at

Lord's which made him a subject of dinner conversations in every Bangladeshi household.

On December 1 last year, Tamim creamed a couple of boundaries before being wrongly adjudged leg-before in a game that the Tigers lost. Tamim however ended the year with a hurricane 95 to help the Tigers to a series win, leaving his home ground with a glint in his eyes.

What a difference a year has made!

Today Tamim will, given all the confirmations received from the team management, play in the first ODI against Pakistan after drop-

ping out of the Twenty20 game on Tuesday due to a sore knee. "As far as I know, his [Tamim Iqbal's] knee has responded well to the treatment and it looks like he can take his place in the top-order. That's good news for us again," said coach Stuart Law yesterday.

On the face of it, an injury is quite usual for an international cricketer. Tamim's brave move to play through pain last year won him praise from all quarters, so when he wasn't deemed fit enough for the Pakistan Twenty20, it should have been treated as another misfortune for the left-hander.

Only that it wasn't received as such.

Nudges and winks are abounding the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium which makes cruel suggestions towards the man, and it is coming from every corner of the cricketing circle.

Is the injury real? Is he taking his place for granted? Does he think he is above the system?

Of course all these (and more) questions on Tamim's intentions weren't thought up in one day. Skipping training at the drop of a hat, fielding in largely one area of the field or missing a National Cricket League match are some of the ammunitions drawn against him. A player could get injuries to miss training or is hidden as a fielder, but the same person has played with a bung wrist and was one of the better Bangladesh fielders (remember the "Superman" catch from 2007) till the injury.

To add fuel to the fire, the Bangladesh team physician was seemingly unaware of Tamim's knee injury and the player himself stated that his pull-out was purely precautionary; yet he had failed a fitness test before the game.

Ultimately, runs will judge a player

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Dashing Tigers opener Tamim Iqbal (C) takes part in a sprinting exercise with batting gears on while Imrul Kayes (L) and trainer Grant Luden are setting the pace at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Younis wary of Tigers

SHAHNOOR RABBANI

After possibly the biggest victory in Bangladesh's cricketing history at the 1999 World Cup against Pakistan, defeating the same opponents have proved to be a bit of a pickle for the Tigers.

Since that famous victory in Northampton twelve years ago, the two teams have met 30 times across all formats and on no occasion have Bangladesh won. There were a few close shaves for Pakistan along the way, most notably the Multan Test in 2003. The overall win-loss ratio since their first encounter in 1986 is badly one-sided.

With the ODI series starting today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, the visitors will once again be firm favourites, especially after they thoroughly dominated Sri Lanka in United Arab Emirates recently.

Despite the form and the overwhelmingly Pakistan-favoured past record, Younis Khan believed that Bangladesh are not to be taken lightly even after their easy 50-run victory in the Twenty20 on Tuesday.

"In international games, you have to take the opposition seriously. After the series you can say whether it was an easy series or a hard one," said Younis during yesterday's press conference.

He said that Pakistan's recent success have been because of a formidable and varied bowling attack as well as a proper balance in youth and experience. "I think we have a good combination of young and the old. Especially in the bowling department, the bowling wins us matches. We have a lot of quality spinners now, especially in [Saeed] Ajmal, [Shoaib] Malik, [Mohammad] Hafeez, and [Shahid] Afridi," he said.

"We also have a very good pace attack with Aizaz Cheema, Umar Gul and Sohail Tanveer. So that's why I think we are winning matches consistently now," Younis added.

Although none of the Pakistan batsmen went on to make big runs in the T20, Younis was bullish that the batting would come good when required. "The good thing about the batting is that when you need the players to perform they have been performing. If our batsmen keep performing like that then we will win in every series," he added.

Emeka beefs up MSC

SPORTS REPORTER

Emeka Euzegio, the former Nigerian striker of Mohammedan SC, arrived in the city yesterday with four of his countrymen to forge a new chapter with the club. The striker who was one of the famous strikers of the nineties for the Black and Whites, will be guiding the side in the fifth edition of the professional football league The Bangladesh Premier League which is expected to get underway in the last week of December.

The Nigerian, who maintained close ties with the Motijheel outfit since his playing days, brought four players from the Nigerian league to gear up the club's

Sk Russel, Farashganj complete registration

FOOTBALL

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel KC and Farashganj SC completed their player registrations on the last day of the local players' registration at the Bangladesh Football Federation House yesterday. Sheikh Russel, the third-place finishers in the Bangladeshi League last season, registered 17 of their local players, while six foreign recruits will be registered within the next 15 days.

Sheikh Russel have scooped up national team's goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee, Yeamin Munna, Zahid Parvez, Faisal Mahmud, Alamu Bukola and Anwar Hossain from other clubs while Mamun Khan and Monaem Khan left the club.

Veteran coach Maruf Haque was also unveiled as the new coach of the Dhanmondi-based club. Maruf, who was the coach of Muktiyoddha Sangsad last season, hoped his young side can put up a fight for the title.

"My squad may be young but they are promising at the same time. I have worked with these boys for the last two weeks and tried to channel the tactics in to them. I believe they can make that work and put on a fight for the title."

Nurul Alam Chowdhury, president of the club, vowed to

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Bangladesh football team train at the Sri Fort Sports Complex in New Delhi yesterday, two days ahead of the SAFF Championship. Placed in Group B, Bangladesh will face Pakistan in the opening match of the regional football event at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on Friday.

Siddikur's UBS challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman will be hoping to end the season on a high when he tees off for the 2.75 million dollar UBS Hong Kong Open at the Hong Kong Golf Club this morning. The 2010 Brunei Open winner who has had a fairly consistent season this year, is currently seventh in the Asian Order of Merit, and will likely give his best shot for a tour victory this year along with a coup at the top of the Order.

The 27-year old has participated in 17 tour events this season and his latest was a joint 15th finish in the rain-affected Iskander Johor Open in Malaysia ten days ago.