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BATTLE ASIA



Against All Odds

Tigers open campaign against India today

BISHWAJIT ROY

It is not that Bangladesh boast a very good record against neighbours India in one-day cricket since their rivalry started in the 1998 Asia Cup. Yet if someone these days calls a Bangladeshi victory over these opponents as an upset, it hurts the Tigers, especially when it comes to the 50-overs competition -- the format the Tigers excelled considerably.

Experienced campaigner Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who has sweet memories of contributing notably in his side's all three wins in 24 previous meetings against India, was as calm as ever at the pre-match press conference and responding quietly on questions of his team's chances against the wounded Indians in their first match of the Asia Cup today at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

But a question from an Indian journalist hurt his ego and he said: "Actually I don't consider beating India as an upset as we have beaten them before."

It's not only an emotional statement from the "Narail Express" as there is logic in his claims when the Tigers are playing in their home condition. True that Bangladesh had often pulled off upsets in one-day interna-

tionals, but over the last couple of years they made such a strong stride that can be called a competitive team if not a 'dangerous' side. They have learnt the craft of this format much better than the remaining two.

Their performance in the last edition including a great win against these opponents which cancelled out Sachin Tendulkar's memorable 100th century in that match is part of the history.

So, there is a lot for the Tigers to take inspirations from before the battle against Virat Kohli's side but what happened in the past is written only in the record books. One will have to look at the present to keep the momentum going. And Mashrafe also didn't find any reason to cling on to history only.

Playing without superstar like Shakib Al Hasan and last tournament's hero Tamim Iqbal is not an ideal situation for the home side. The absence of banned Shakib means the team think-tank will have to consider two players in place of one, but then again they can take inspiration from the past as they had played good cricket without the two stalwarts. Bangladesh enter the tournament on the back of a forlorn series against Sri Lanka and again Bangladesh have the habit of making a comeback

when their backs are against the wall.

But for that, as Mashrafe said, the young guys should take responsibly to cement the team's claim as a good one-day unit.

Win always works like a tonic and all the gloom will be lifted if Mushfiquur Rahim's side can pull off a victory in the first game.

But the task is not at all an easy one for the hosts and Mashrafe warned if the conditions suited batting like the one in the last game at this venue against New Zealand where Bangladesh won by four wickets, things would be very difficult considering the strength of India's batting despite the absence of MS Dhoni.

"If it's the way how it was against the Kiwis it will be difficult for us. A total of 300 is okay, but anything above it will be difficult. Chasing 300 and 350 is different. Against New Zealand, the pitch didn't help bowlers. But if it's a bit slow now, it will be good," observed Mashrafe adding that he was not sure about the dew factor.

Miracles still happen, but Bangladesh must rely on and bring out their best abilities to bring back those sweet memories of 2012 Asia Cup.

The good times and the bad times both go away and both of today's



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh skipper Mushfiquur Rahim (L) will be banking a lot on the youngsters like Mominul Haque (R) if they are to get a result against India in their first match of the Asia Cup at the Fatullah Stadium today.

Short verdict of spot-fixing trial today

SPORTS REPORTER

The anti-corruption tribunal of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will deliver the short judgement today with regards to the nine individuals accused of spot-fixing in the second edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

"The tribunal will deliver the short judgement tomorrow [Wednesday] and a press conference will be held the day after," confirmed former cricketer Shakil Kasem, who is one of the members of the three-member tribunal headed by former Supreme Court Judge Khademul Islam Chowdhury. Azmal Ul Hossain QC is the other member on the panel. Supreme Court Judge Abdur Rashid, chairman of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's disciplinary panel, formed the tribunal.

After the initial hearing on November 24, the full hearing began on February 19.

U-19s reach Plate final

SPORTS REPORTER

Mosaddek Hossain's unbeaten half-century led Bangladesh into the Plate Cup finals of the Under-19 World Cup after they beat Zimbabwe by 72 runs at Abu Dhabi yesterday.

They will face New Zealand in the Plate finals on Thursday.

Mosaddek's 83, which came off 66 balls, included six fours and a six and helped the junior Tigers post 265 at the end of 50 overs. He was well supported by Joyraz Sheikh's 58.

In reply, Bangladesh's bowlers ran through Zimbabwe's batting line-up and restricted them to 193 for 9 in their allotted overs. Captain Mehedy Hassan scalped three wickets while pacer Mustafizur Rahman took two.

SL-PAK SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA				
K Perera c Akmal b Gul	14			
Thirimanne b Ajmal	102			
Sangakkara c Shehzad b Gul	67			
Jayawardene b Afridi	13			
Mathews not out	55			
Perera c Shehzad b Afridi	6			
de Silva run out	2			
Chandimal not out	19			
Extras: (b-4, lb-6, w-8)	18			
Total: (For 6 wickets in 50 overs)	296			
Did not bat: Senanayake, Malinga, Lakmal.				
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-189, 3-204, 4-224, 5-245, 6-251.				

PAKISTAN				
Sharjeel c Mathews b Lakmal	26			
Shehzad b de Silva	28			
Hafeez lbw b Mathews	18			
Maqsood c de Silva b Senanayake	17			
Misbah c Senanayake b Malinga	73			
Akmal c Sangakkara b Lakmal	74			
Afridi c Chandimal b Malinga	4			
Bhatti b Malinga	18			
Gul c de Silva b Malinga	2			
Ajmal lbw b Malinga	10			
Junaid not out	1			
Extras: (lb-3, w-10)	13			
Total: (All out in 48.5 overs)	284			
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-77, 3-83, 4-121, 5-242, 6-252, 7-254, 8-262, 9-281.				

Bowler				
	O	M	R	W
Malinga	9.5	0	52	5
Lakmal	9	1	65	2
Senanayake	9	0	47	1
De Silva	10	1	56	1
T Perera	6	0	36	0
Mathews	5	1	25	1

Malinga powers SL to opening win

SAKEB SUBHAN

Defending champions Pakistan got their Asia Cup campaign off to a bad start by losing the tournament opener by 12 runs against Sri Lanka at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday. Sri Lanka rode on a fine ton by Lahiru Thirimanne to post 296 for six before their bowlers, led by a five-wicket haul by Lasith Malinga, delivered a narrow win despite a stirring counter attack from Pakistan.

With 82 runs needed off the last 10 overs, Pakistan skipper Misbahul Haq and Umar Akmal launched a scathing onslaught. Akmal hammered a six and two fours in the 41st over bowled by Suranga Lakmal and followed it up with two more boundaries in the next over by Sachithra Senanayake, bringing the equation down to a very manageable 57 off eight overs with six wickets in hand. But things changed drastically when Akmal was caught behind off Lakmal, which was swiftly followed by Shahid Afridi's wicket. Then came the killer blow when Misbah holed out to deep square-leg off Malinga. Bilawal Bhatti led the tailenders in an unlikely victory charge, but Malinga was too good, picking up the last five wickets to fall, bowling Bhatti to seal the victory.

In chase of 297, Sharjeel Khan gave the initial impetus with a 23-ball 26 but his ambitious pull off Lakmal found the hands of midwicket in the seventh over. Ahmed Shehzad then picked up the mantle and hit boundaries in each of the next four overs, but his promising start ended when a ball from left-arm spinner Chaturanga de Silva sneaked through his forward defence in the 13th over. Pakistan were in hot water when, in the next over, Angelo Mathews trapped Mohammad Hafeez in front to leave the team at 83 for three. Sohaib Maqsood joined skipper Misbah in the middle and added 38 runs in a sedate, 10-over stand before hitting a rank long hop from Senanayake straight down deep midwicket's throat.

Then Akmal came in and along with his captain, lifted the run rate for the final charge.

Earlier, after choosing to bat, Sri Lanka's innings was



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built on the 161-run second-wicket partnership between Kumar Sangakkara and Thirimanne. Initially consolidating after Umar Gul dismissed opener Kusal Perera, the pair steadily built up the tempo with the odd off-side-piercing boundary. By the time Saeed Ajmal and Afridi were introduced, both were absolutely at ease on the easy-paced Fatullah wicket. Singles were picked at will and boundaries dispatched whenever the bowlers erred in length.

Against the run of play Gul banged one in short to have Sangakkara pulling straight to midwicket. Undeterred, Thirimanne, after hitting the innings's first six off Mohammad Hafeez, soon unfurled a picturesque cover drive off Gul for the single that gave him his second ODI century. But the batting Powerplay proved more hindrance than help as Sri Lanka lost both Thirimanne -- driving loosely at Ajmal to be bowled -- and Mahela Jayawardene, chopping on off Afridi, while adding only 29 runs in the five overs. Thisara Perera soon holed out at deep midwicket off Afridi in the 43rd over, before de Silva's run-out in the next over. Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews carried the charge in the slog overs and although the captain scored an unbeaten 50-ball 55, Pakistan's bowlers -- aided by the late cluster of wickets -- did well to



Sri Lanka batsman Lahiru Thirimanne raises his bat on reaching his century against Pakistan in the Asia Cup opener at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Not mandatory to ask captain'

Mushy called in for hearing

SPORTS REPORTER

It's not very often that a captain and a chief selector spend a large amount of time the day before a match discussing issues that do not deal with the make-up of the playing eleven. However, Mushfiquur Rahim's open criticism of the changes that chief selector Faruque Ahmed -- who arrived from India yesterday -- brought to the Asia Cup squad, meant that a one-to-one discussion to 'cool down' the scenario was a must.

Mushfiquur was also called in yesterday for a hearing from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to explain his outburst.

At the end of the meet it seemed as though both parties were satisfied, as Faruque later put it, "There's no need to stretch this issue, it has come to an end now."

While the two may have made up, Mushfiquur's public outburst has revealed two important aspects. The first is that life for Mushfiquur and the team management will not be as easy as it was during the previous selection regime. Based on recent events, Faruque seems the kind of character who will look to enforce anything that he finds logical, regardless of the barriers that lie ahead.

The move to drop both Mahmudullah Riyad and Shafiul Islam may not have gone down well with Mushfiquur, but it was a rather bold and one with merit, especially in Riyad's case.

When asked why he had not discussed

the issue with Mushfiquur, Faruque decided to stick to the manual.

"According to our job description it is not mandatory for us to consult the captain. Likewise the captain does not need our help to make the playing eleven. If he wants to he can but it's not mandatory.

"And it's not as though we did not consult them at all. Our cut-off time to submit the team was on Saturday and we talked to the coach and Vibhav Singh (physio). The coach represents the team management as well," said Faruque.

The chief selector however also hinted that he would support making discussions between the captain and the selection committee mandatory when selecting both the final eleven and the squad. A healthy debate, according to Faruque, can only help the team progress.

It has also been learnt that the outburst has led to the board deciding to start a process that would make the players follow the code of conduct more coherently, or in other words restrict comments made to the media to prevent matters from 'going out of control'.

Whatever steps are taken, in light of recent events it will be in the best interests of both parties -- players and selectors -- if the lines of communications are more open and if they take each other into confidence before making decisions.

Relying on youngsters

SPORTS REPORTER

Dinesh Karthik has a big hole to fill in the Indian batting line-up. Replacing someone like Mahendra Singh Dhoni is no doubt going to be difficult, but the batsman feels that the youngsters are more than capable of making a turnaround from the eight-match winless streak starting from today when they take on Bangladesh in their first game of the Asia Cup.

"I think it's a big tournament for all of us. It's going to be exciting for all the young players in the team and we are looking forward to it," he said in the pre-match press conference.

"I think Bangladesh is a fantastic one-day team. There were couple of really close games against Sri Lanka, everybody knows, they are a good one-day unit. Obviously we will be giving a lot of respect to their abilities. But at the same time we will go in all guns blazing," he added.

India's main issue will be settling their middle-order batsmen. Without the likes of Dhoni, Yuvraj Singh and Suresh Raina, they

will have to fill it in with Karthik and two other batsmen. They have the options of Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane, who however, are more used to batting at the top. They also have in the list Ambati Rayudu and Stuart Binny both of who could add up to the inexperienced middle order. The bowlers are expected to remain constant with Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Aswvin in the spin department, with Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammad Shami and Varun Aaron handling the pace department.

Hitters Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are expected to make-up the top-order.

Despite the inexperience, Karthik believes that they will hit form.

"There are plenty of guys who are very experienced and everybody will try pool in and give it their best shot. For me it's all about coming here and getting into the zone as soon as possible," he said.

The absence of Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan from Bangladesh's squad according to Karthik, might lead them to work on new strategies. "They are major players and if they