

Tigers' WI mission starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

WEST INDIES VS BANGLADESH
CUP 2014

Zero wins in 10 games. That is what Bangladesh's win-loss ratio in ODIs look like in 2014; the worst of the lot. In fact Afghanistan, Scotland, Kenya, Netherlands and even the UAE have fared better.

It is with this nightmare of a statistic that the Tigers will take on a full-strength West Indies side, unlike their last tour in 2009, at the National Cricket Stadium in St George's, Grenada today. Seems like a task too hard? Considering the fact that Bangladesh's best batsman has averaged two runs per innings this year, that their highest wicket taker has a stupendous bowling average of 109 and that they are missing their top all-rounder, yes, on the surface it probably does.

However, as grave as the situation may

seem, the Tigers have had something to cheer about in each of their tours of the West Indies. Be it the draw in the Test at Gros Islet in 2004, where Khaled Mashud and Mohammad Rafiq sparkled with surprising centuries, their 2007 ODI World Cup ousting of India in the first round, or the whitewashes in 2009 where a Shakib Al Hasan-led Bangladesh thumped a second-string West Indian unit. Funnily enough, the two-nil series win five years ago means that the Tigers lead the hosts by two games to one in terms of Tests played in the Caribbean. An interesting bit of trivia for Bangladesh fans -- only South Africa and Australia have similarly outgunned the West Indies in their own backyard, albeit having played significantly more matches..

The question however remains as to whether the dismantled Tigers can use their past record to encourage themselves. The most immediate signs look hopeful.

Opener Tamim Iqbal seems to have hit form in the last three practice matches -- two at home before their departure and one one-dayer against Grenada on Sunday.

His 91 off 86 in the game against Grenada, according to team manager Habibul Bashar, was on a two-paced wicket. The left-hander had reportedly shown great technique to handle the nature of the pitch. The same match saw Mahmudullah Riyad also show encouraging signs with an aggressive 78.

Bangladesh's spinners have a decent record against the West Indies. Even leaving aside Shakib, the other spinners seem to have had a good time bowling against them. Abdur Razzak has taken 18 wickets in 13 games at an average of 28.66 against the West Indies -- the highest by a Bangladeshi. Mahmudullah Riyad comes next with 11 wickets at an average of 27.72. Shohag Gazi however, holds pole position in the aver-

ages with nine wickets in five games at 17.33. Gazi's brilliant statistics is due to the dream run that he had in his debut series back in 2012.

However, with the spinners out of form, the Tigers are expected to depend more on their pacers this time. A lot is expected from the likes of Taskin Ahmed and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

For the West Indies, their key player has to be their captain Dwayne Bravo. He has had a phenomenal run both with the bat and ball this year. The highest run-getter and wicket-taker for the West Indies this year, Bravo will be raring to have a go at the struggling Tigers.

While their management may not be in the best of states with the controversy surrounding their coach Otis Gibson -- he was reportedly not present during his side's training yesterday -- the West Indians go in to the series as clear favourites.

Mominul and the extra pacer

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As Bangladesh take on the West Indies in the first ODI at the National Cricket Stadium in Grenada today, there will be two issues that the team management will be looking to settle. The first will be Shakib Al Hasan's replacement at the top order and the composition of the bowling attack.

While Imrul Kayes's recent form has almost confirmed him a spot in the precarious number three position, number four will be a three-way battle between Shamsur Rahman, Mominul Haque and Mithun Ali.

Of the three, the left-handed Mominul -- who has had a decent run this year as compared to his teammates and with 250 ODI runs is the third highest run-getter for the Tigers this year -- holds the edge. However, it's been Mominul's recent lack of form that has compelled selectors to think of a replacement. He had a torrid time during Bangladesh A's tour of the West Indies a few months earlier and was dropped from the side after scoring a disappointing six in the first ODI against India in June.

The Bangladesh-West Indies 1st ODI will be broadcast live on Gazi Television and TEN Cricket from 7:30pm BST

Shamsur Rahman made a good start in the practice game against Grenada with a quick 32 but failed to carry on. He will be Mominul's closest competitor. Shamsur though has had a haphazard year. He scored 133 runs in six ODIs this year, which includes two scores of nought. It would be a surprise if Mithun Ali, who only debuted in the last series against India, is picked ahead of the two. While Mithun showed promise in that series by scoring 26 on a Mirpur wicket that -- unlike its nature -- produced plenty of movement and bounce, selecting him over the other two could be a gamble.

The other issue for the Tigers to resolve is their bowling attack. Will they go with a traditional three-man spin attack or will they opt to include a third pacer?

While Mahmudullah's all-round ability is expected to grant him a place in the side, it is not yet certain if both Shohag Gazi and Abdur Razzak will play the first ODI. Statistics show that Bangladesh's spinners have generally had a good run against the West Indians, but with both Gazi and Razzak out of touch and the wicket at Grenada expected to generate bounce, the visitors might just include an extra pacer.

It will be hard to drop Taskin Ahmed after his brilliance in the last series against India; which would mean that he could well share the new ball with his role model Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. Rubel Hossain was not included in the practice game against Grenada, which shows that the team management is likely to go with Al-Amin Hossain if a third pacer is chosen.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh women's cricket team members cycle at the National Cricket Academy gym during a practice session yesterday.

SA take series

REUTERS, Bulawayo

Quinton de Kock tied a one-day international record as South Africa beat Zimbabwe by 61 runs on Tuesday to take a 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The 21-year-old wicketkeeper-opening batsman made 38 to equal the mark of England's Jonathan Trott in reaching the landmark of 1,000 runs in only 21 one-day games.

Faf du Plessis top-scored with 55 as South Africa were bowled out for 257 in 49.4 overs after being put in to bat.

It was only the third time in 34 ODI meetings that Zimbabwe had bowled out their southern African rivals.

Out-of-form South Africa captain AB de Villiers was involved in a bizarre dismissal.

He missed a delivery from spinner Prosper Utseya and, in the mistaken belief that Richmond Mutumbami did the same, set off for a single only for the bemused wicketkeeper to run him out for one.

Sean Williams (55) then passed 50 for the second successive match but Zimbabwe were bowled out for 196 in 49.1 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: 257 all out in 49.4 overs (De Kock 38, Du Plessis 55, Duminy 36, Miller 45, Parnell 24, Abbott 23; Vitori 2-57, Utseya 2-39, Nyumbu 2-44, Williams 2-37)

ZIMBABWE: 196 all out in 49.1 overs (Williams 55, Madziva 25, Nyumbu 18, Vitori 20 not out; Parnell 3-28, McLaren 3-21, Tahir 2-26)

Result: South Africa won by 61 runs and lead the 3-match series 2-0.

Player-of-the-match: Wayne Parnell.



South Africa players celebrate the dismissal of Brendan Taylor (R) during the second one-day international against Zimbabwe at the Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday.

A central problem

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After the national U-23 team's 3-1 win over Bangladesh Army in recent a practice match, head coach Lodewijk de Kruif expressed his concern over the backline, which looked ill at ease and leaked an embarrassing goal in the second half.

The defence, especially the centre-back position, which used to be the strength of Bangladesh national team for a long time since independence, started to look vulnerable in the early 2000s.

Rajani Kanta Barman and Mohammad Sujan were probably the two last recognizable centre-backs, but since the departure of those two, no one has really looked

comfortable in that position.

Ariful Islam came with some promise but his frequent injury thwarted his progress while striker-turned-defender Nasir Chowdhury, young Yesin Khan, Kesto Kumar and teenager Tutul Hossain Badsha are trying to make an impression, but certainly not with great assurance.

Former national team's mid-fielder and current Muktijoddha Sangsads coach Shafiqul Islam Manik feels the lack of opportunities for local defenders in professional league matches is the reason they cannot develop into solid defenders.

The clubs and the football federation together will have to think about this. The clubs pin their hopes on foreign centre-backs, but since the departure of those two, no one has really looked

ers can't develop match temperament and thus struggle in international matches," said Manik. "We have a few good players in right-back, left-back and midfield positions only because they are getting regular opportunity to play in at the club level."

Most of the big clubs in the premier league are banking on foreigners in those crucial positions these days. Abahani have been using Ghanaian stopper Samad Yousuf for the last five seasons while Mohammedan, too, have used foreign stoppers for five out of the last seven seasons. The same is true for Brothers and Muktijoddha and the minnows, too, are following suit.

Echoing Manik's sentiments, former national team's defender Jewel Rana said there is a shortage

of quality defenders due to the lack of competitions at district level and also due to the plethora of foreign defenders at club level.

"A player should have the experience of playing 100 to 150 matches before joining a professional league club but now a days they spend one or two seasons in lower leagues before playing in the professional league and thus they come in top level competition less matured."

"A defender will mature only if he gets chance to play but they are not getting enough opportunity to play in the top level due to foreign players," opined the former defender, adding that he had spent five seasons at lower level competitions before joining the then premier division side Muktijoddha Sangsads in 1988.

Nepal name friendly squad

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All Nepal Football Federation (ANFA) yesterday announced a 20-member squad for the two friendlies against Bangladesh U-23 team, with the inclusion of seven booters who were in the national side during last year's SAFF Championship.

However, two key strikers -- Bimal Gharti Magar and Bharat Khawas have been kept out of the squad even though they have been included in the squad for the Asian Games. Bimal is currently playing in Belgium while Bharat is nursing an injury.

The two matches will take place in Dhaka on Aug 26 and Sylhet on Aug 29 as part of both side's preparation for the Asian Games, scheduled for September 19 to October 4 in South Korea.

"No doubt Nepal are a good team and a speed on, but they are better on home soil. This time we will play on our home ground and will try to take home advantage to exact the revenge of the SAFF Championship (where Bangladesh lost 0-2)," said captain Mamunul Islam, who failed to get a place in the side during that match in Kathmandu due to an injury.

SQUAD
Bharat Shah, Bhola Nath Silwal, Asim Jung Karki, Amar Dangol, Jagajeev Singh Shrestha, Prakash Budhathoki, Sushil KC, Heman Gurung, Biraj Maharjan, Sandip Rai, Sagar Thapa, Aditya Chaudhary, Rabindra Shrestha, Ajit Bhandari, Ranjit Dhimal, Bikram Lama, Alan Neupane, Bikesh Kuthu, Dinesh Thapa Magar, Shyam Nepali.

Phelps making int'l return

AFP, Gold Coast

Record-breaking Olympian Michael Phelps will swim his first international meet since coming out of retirement at this week's Pan Pacific Championships as he seeks a return to winning ways.

Phelps, 29, the 18-time Olympic gold medalist, will take his quest for form to Australia's Gold Coast after he ended this month's US Championships with a couple of near-misses but no wins.

Despite this, Phelps made the powerful 60-strong American team for the Gold Coast meet, just four months after ending a 20-month retirement which began after the London Olympics.

Australia's James Magnussen will resume his sprint rivalry with Nathan Adrian, part of a heavyweight US team also including Ryan Lochte, Missy Franklin and Katie Ledecky.

But attention will inevitably focus on the continuing comeback of Phelps, the greatest Olympian of all time who will contest up to five individual events.

India send SOS to Ravi

AFP, New Delhi



India's cricket chiefs on Tuesday effectively sidelined head coach Duncan Fletcher for the one-day series against England following their 3-1 defeat in the Tests, placing former all-rounder Ravi Shastri in charge.

Shastri, in England as a TV commentator, has been asked to "oversee" the squad for the five-match series as part of a shake-up in which the bowling and fielding coaches have also been ordered to stand aside.

"The BCCI [Board of Control for Cricket in India] has decided to avail the services of former India captain Ravi Shastri to oversee and guide the team for the one-day matches against

England," a statement said.

"Duncan Fletcher will continue as head coach, while Shastri will be the overall in-charge of cricket affairs of the Indian team."

Bowling coach Joe Daws and fielding coach Trevor Penney were given "a break" with former Indian Test players Sanjay Bangar and Bharat Arun being appointed in their place as assistant coaches.

"In the continuing efforts to re-energise the support to the team... the BCCI has given a break to Daws and Penney for the one-day series," the statement said.

England on Sunday inflicted yet another humiliating defeat upon India as they won the fifth and final Test at The Oval by an innings and 244 runs to complete a 3-1 series win.

India's spectacular collapse has set off a flood of angry criticism at home, with some fans

calling for captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni to be sacked and others saying players should forfeit their wages.

Critics have also been baying for the blood of Fletcher, a former Zimbabwe batsman who has also coached England, saying his position had become untenable.

But former India all-rounder Madan Lal said that simply appointing Shastri was not going to yield results.

"You have to sit down and ask the coach what went wrong. Merely sidelining him is not going to help," he told AFP.

"His [Shastri's] presence is not going to make any difference."

"We are the cricket powerhouse, the world is looking at us. We must behave in a more professional way," he added.

The first ODI is on August 25 in Bristol.