

Star CRICKET WORLD CUP SPECIAL

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5 facts

Bangladesh have never beaten Sri Lanka in a World Cup. They however have beaten them four times in 37 encounters.

Bangladesh have never won a match against Sri Lanka batting first. All four wins have come while chasing.

Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene and Tillakaratne Dilshan have scored a total of eight ODI centuries against Bangladesh. None of the others in the Sri Lankan line-up have reached the three figure-mark against the Tigers.

Shahid Afridi's bowling average against Sri Lanka is 48.8, his worst against all teams.

Tamim Iqbal amongst the current line-up, has scored 420 runs against Sri Lanka and is the highest run-getter.



Mominul Haque balances a ball on his bat as he takes a breather during the Tigers' practice session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Can Chandika twist the tale?

BISHWAJIT ROY from Melbourne

That today's game has the potential to decide Bangladesh's fate in the World Cup is a fact that is quite well known. Many of Bangladesh's players believe that they have a higher chance of beating Sri Lanka as opposed to England or New Zealand and want to make the most of the match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

While that is of course the team target, coach Chandika Hathurusingha could possibly have an additional sense of encouragement.

The 46-year-old was Sri Lanka's assistant coach for a year and was let go in June 2010 due to disciplinary issues. Despite that he had a great relation with a number of Lankan players. After Hathurusingha's departure, Kumar Sangakkara, through a letter, lauded the coach's 'no nonsense approach' and stated that he had made an amazing contribution to the team.

There are many who believe that Hathurusingha's knowledge about the Sri Lankan outfit could prove to be advantageous for Bangladesh and one

of them is skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

"There's no doubt about that. Our coach has a vast knowledge about this Sri Lankan team and it will help us a lot. Say if a batsman has a weak-

team management to create pitches that provided swing and bounce, rarely seen in Bangladesh. That led to the Indian batsmen crumpling for some of their lowest scores. The Tigers, who were going through a



ness against the yorker, it will be a good thing if the bowler knows that. It is important to focus on these issues but we should mainly depend on our own strengths," explained Mashrafe.

Hathurusingha is known for his aggressive approach. In a home series against India last year he reportedly managed to convince the

bad patch back then, however, struggled to capitalise.

While Mashrafe, during the press conference, reiterated the importance of focusing on one's own strengths, there's no doubt that Hathurusingha's inputs will be crucial if the Tigers want to get rid of the likes of Mahela Jayawardene and Sangakkara early in the innings.

THIRD EYE

A case for the 'minnows'

ATIQUE ANAM

After 15 matches of the World Cup so far, some of which have been entirely uncompetitive, we got arguably the most exciting and certainly the closest contest yesterday. It didn't involve any of the 'big boys', rather featured two so-called minnows – Ireland and United Arab Emirates. The irony is this edition could be the last chance for these teams to showcase their worth to the world audience. Why? Simply because the International Cricket Council (ICC) doesn't think these teams are competitive enough.

A look at the results of the 15 completed matches so far will give us an idea about the warped notion of ICC's reasoning.

Out of the eight completed matches between full-member nations, the closest contest (in terms of margin of victory) has been the 62-run win for South Africa against Zimbabwe. Three of the others resulted in 100-plus run victories while one was a thumping eight-wicket victory.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the first encounter between two associate members was yesterday's one and we all know how competitive and exciting it turned out to be. However, what comes as a direct rebuttal to ICC's stance is that out of the five contests between associates and full members, the associates have won one and gave their big



brothers a run for their money on three other occasions.

Now the pretext behind ICC's decision to trim the number of participants from 14 to 10 is that the group stages in the current format involve too many matches for the 'minnows', which is not a hit with the audience, television viewers and sponsors.

However, what the ICC does not seem to realise is that it is not the number of teams rather the length and format that is making this tournament less attractive. The decision to trim the number of associates also goes against ICC's initiative of spreading the game in the mid '90s.

While the ICC increased the number of teams over the last two decades, introducing more associates and helping the game flourish in those countries, it also introduced some apparently unnecessary 'super sixes' and 'super eights' stages to the tournament, stretching a prim one-month tournament to a tiring one-and-a-half-month affair.

The 2007 tournament, which featured 16 teams and four groups of four in the group stages, was perhaps the most logical and attractive format – barring the super eights – considering that it catered to a wider range of teams while at the same time minimising the number of group stage matches. However, that format didn't fit the bill of ICC because it didn't provide enough insurance for the big

UAE-IRELAND

	R/B	4/6
Amjad c Sorensen b O'Brien	45/71	5/0
Berenger c Porterfield b Stirling	13/25	1/0
Chandan c O'Brien b Stirling	0/4	0/0
Khurram Ibw b Dockrell	36/53	2/0
Patil c Stirling b O'Brien	2/8	0/0
Anwar c Wilson b Sorensen	106/83	10/1
Mustafa c Wilson b Cusack	2/9	0/0
Javed c Joyce b Sorensen	42/35	5/0
Naveed c b Cusack	13/11	2/0
Taqir not out	2/2	0/0
Guruge not out	0/0	0/0
Extras: (b-1, lb-4, w-11, nb-1)	17	
Total: (For 9 wkt in 50 overs)	278	
Fall of wickets: 1-49, 2-53, 3-73, 4-78, 5-123, 6-131, 7-238, 8-269, 9-276.		

Bowler

Mooney

Sorensen

Cusack

Stirling

O'Brien

Dockrell

Porterfield b Taqir

Stirling c Patil b Guruge

Joyce c Patil b Javed

N O'Brien b Ibw b Taqir

Ballimbi c sub Hader b Naved

Wilson c Javed b Naved

K O'Brien c Naved b Javed

Mooney c Anjed b Javed

Cusack not out

Dockrell not out

Extras: (b-4, lb-4, w-2, nb-2)

Total: (For 8 wkt in 49.2 overs)

Did not bat: Sorensen

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-72, 3-94, 4-97, 5-171, 6-243, 7-259, 8-267.

Bowler

Naved

Guruge

Javed

Mustafa

Chandan

Result: Ireland won by 2 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Gary Wilson

Toss: Ireland

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Man of Steel

GARY WILSON



When Gary Wilson arrived at the crease, Ireland were staring at a shock defeat. Halfway through their innings, they were struggling at 98 for 4. And that's when a superb partnership between Wilson and Kevin O'Brien dramatically changed the game. Wilson hammered nine fours in his 69-ball 80 and made sure that he stuck to his end while O'Brien dispatched the deliveries. It was like bread and butter; the perfect combination. Perhaps the best part about Wilson was his ability to rotate the strike at ease. Towards the end he too joined in the fun with a string of hits that took Ireland closer to their target.

'We haven't played our best cricket yet'

SPORTS REPORTER from Melbourne

Unlike their opponents, Sri Lanka have had a good experience in Australian conditions. Having played against Bangladesh a number of times in the last one year, they also know their opponents quite well.

The Lankans in fact have won six out of the 17 matches at this venue as a result there is no shortage of experience. The recent picture however has been gloomy. They went down to Zimbabwe in

the warm-up, were thumped by New Zealand and then struggled to a late win against Afghanistan. Captain Angelo Mathews admitted that it wasn't the best of starts for them.

"I think wherever you play, you've got to play your best cricket. We haven't played our

best cricket yet. Regardless of the pitches and conditions, if we play our best cricket, if we play our unique type of cricket, we can win against any team," said Mathews at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

"The Australian pitches have a lot more bounce and the ball comes on to the bat really well. So as batters when you get set, you can go for a big one, so hopefully the batters can do their job, and hopefully if you bat first, the bowlers can come into play in the second," he added.

Despite enjoying a great head-to-head record -- 32 to 4 -- against the Tigers, Mathews was aware of the possible threats that his side could face.

"It's certainly going to be a tough game. Bangladesh have performed really well in

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Mash confident of acing MCG test

BISHWAJIT ROY from Melbourne

It's a huge ground this; the MCG. Three times the capacity of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium at Mirpur; one could probably play two matches side-by-side here. Even if half the stands here are occupied with Bangladeshi supporters, the Melbourne Cricket Ground can become a haven for the Tigers; for nowhere have they ever witnessed more than 35,000 spectators cheering for them.

These thoughts must have been running through skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's mind when he was gazing at the iconic playground from the highest stands yesterday. It wouldn't have been a surprise had he gotten a little jittery because of the altitude.

There were however no jitters at the pre-match press conference. Generally good in front of the microphone Mashrafe seemed to be at his aggressive best.

"We never played here before. But that doesn't put us on the backfoot. We know what we have to do and we are prepared. We are aiming for a win and our main focus will be to execute the plan well. I am hopeful of doing that," the confident 31-year-old said.

The head-to-head stats don't reflect Mashrafe's enthusiasm though. Bangladesh have only won four out of the 37 encounters against the Lankans. Some of Bangladesh's biggest defeats have also come against the island nation. The skipper though wasn't worried about all that.

"Whether we can do the right things on

the day is more important than thinking on what happened in the past."

There have been a few areas Sri Lanka have been struggling with. Their jittery top order and Lasith Malinga's lack of form are two crucial factors that have been highlighted in the mega event thus far.

The captain however reckoned that at this stage of the competition there is every chance for the players to get settled and start


Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is expecting a tough, but winnable game against Sri Lanka today. PHOTO: AFP

hitting form. "It does not take much time to see someone get their form back," he remarked.

Ever since 2014, the MCG has witnessed five matches, with nine of those team totals being above 250; two 300-plus totals were scored in the World Cup by India and hosts Australia. As a result, a total around 300

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