

# SPORT



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The Export Leader



## 'Look at ourselves, not at the stats'

NAIMUL KARIM

A solitary win against 31 defeats -- a record that is heavily skewed against Bangladesh. However, to ace-all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, the numbers and the past don't matter. The stand-in captain for today's first ODI at Mirpur, exuded confidence ahead of the series opener against Pakistan.

"We have come here to win and that's what we will think about. If we tell ourselves that we have never won against them (Pakistan) and that's why we won't win, then I don't think it will be possible for us to win against anyone. So we have to change that... we haven't beaten them for 16 or how many years... what does that mean? Will we never win? If that is the thought process then Bangladesh's cricket will never progress," Shakib said acidly when reminded about the fact that the only time Bangladesh beat Pakistan was back in 1999.

"We are confident with the way we are performing. We are not trying to make Pakistan look like a small team here. I don't think this Pakistani side is inferior to the ones of the past. They have got world class bowlers. It's just that we have improved and we have several world class players of our own who can tackle them," he added.

The all-rounder also believed that winning the practice match would give the hosts

a boost. "It's difficult to say how the defeat in the practice match will affect them. But the good thing is that we had a few national players over there and they can share the information with us. Their confidence levels will be good too... overall we are in a good mood," claimed Shakib.

The one aspect which Shakib and co can definitely learn about from his teammates who took part in the practice match is Saeed Ajmal's bowling. This is the first time that Ajmal will be taking part in the series since correcting his action. He bowled quite a few overs in that game at Fatullah, where the BCB XI won by one wicket.

Describing Ajmal as a key factor in the series, the left-hander hoped that the spinner finds it hard to settle down with his new action.

The last few years have seen the Tigers battle neck-and-neck with their South Asian neighbours, but they never managed to cross the final hurdle. Shakib recalled the close encounters between the two sides in 2012 and 2014.

"I thought we could have won both the matches in the 2012 Asia Cup... we also should have won the game in 2014. Those matches could have gone differently. Hopefully luck will side with us this time.

"I know that everyone is hungry for a win... especially in the first match. Everyone is hopeful," a confident Shakib said.



Tigers opener Tamim Iqbal yesterday inspects the willow with which he will try and torment his favoured opponents Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## These Tigers are different

One-day series against Pakistan starts today

BISHWAJIT ROY

'Just because you couldn't do something yesterday doesn't mean you can't do it today'. This is the current state of mind of the Bangladesh team and their supporters. Yes, the current Bangladesh team can do it today. Since the players have been exuding confidence about breaking the jinx this time against Pakistan, there are reasons to believe that this is not a wild goose chase.

Since the famous World Cup victory in 1999, Bangladesh could not triumph against Pakistan, but today they are going to start a battle amidst positive vibes all around. The term 'heartbreak' could be aptly associated with the Tigers as far as playing Pakistan was concerned over the last sixteen years.

But still, if losing some close games in the last few years has been sign of narrowing the gap then the Tigers' performance in the ICC World Cup in Australia and New Zealand definitely gave them an edge ahead of the three-match ODI series. With regards to experience of the players, Pakistan had previously always started series against Bangladesh with an advantage, but it's not the case this time. However, it's not the

experience; rather the brand of cricket Bangladesh played during the World Cup has raised the prospect of turning the table.

Good positive cricket and a fearless approach from the Tigers in the World Cup was widely applauded and they looked more mature than at any other time, especially the batting was fantastic despite the opening failure. And this team has such

a positive approach that a player's good knock counts for little if it doesn't benefit the team as a whole. Sabbir Rahman's innings in the practice match gave the impression that Bangladesh are eager to continue that fearless approach. And Tamim Iqbal can bring more relief to the team.

In the bowling department, the team will definitely miss the services of their inspirational skipper and leading pacer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza but the focus will be on the in-form Rubel Hossain. "I enjoy his bowling. Rubel [Hossain] is now totally a different man. I hope he will be the bowler to watch in this series like World Cup," said Mashrafe.

If Bangladesh stick to yesterday's plan then they will play with three pacers to keep their World Cup tempo, which would likely see Rony Talukdar not pairing with Tamim to open the innings and this line of thinking reflects how positive Bangladesh are with their plan.

Bangladesh's batting got the ability to handle the variety of Pakistan's bowling attack and the Tigers' bowling has the potential to test the inexperienced Pakistan batting, so one would not be wrong in saying that this is the best opportunity for the Tigers to rewrite history and embark on a new chapter.



There might be a surprise in store for the fans, with the possibility of Soumya Sarkar (L) opening the innings with Tamim Iqbal against Pakistan at Mirpur today.

PHOTO: STAR

## Zulfiqar takes Yasir's place

ANI, Karachi

Pakistan left-arm orthodox spinner Zulfiqar Babar has been picked in place of injured leg-spinner Yasir Shah for the forthcoming three-match ODI series against Bangladesh, beginning from Friday at Mirpur.

Yasir injured his left hand during a practice match against a BCB XI in Fatullah, and subsequently received three stitches on the injured area.

Yasir became the third player to have been ruled out of the Bangladesh series after Sohaib Maqsood and Sohail Khan.

Though Yasir has been ruled out of the ODI series, he is still in the Test team, the Dawn reported.

Babar made his last ODI appearance in December 2014 and was not a member of Pakistan's World Cup squad.

## IN A NUTSHELL

### Sourav next India coach?

IBN, Kolkata

Sourav Ganguly, the man under whose captaincy Indian cricket learned how to give it back as hard as you get, could soon be once again seeing calling the shots for Team India -- this time as coach.

According to a report in the Indian Express, a Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) insider has revealed that the former India captain has put in an informal word to the new board president Jagmohan Dalmiya about his interest to replace Duncan Fletcher, whose tenure as India coach ended after the World Cup.

"Sourav's achievements as a cricketer and his tactical acumen present a strong case. But he has to apply for the job," the source told the newspaper. "They [Ganguly and Dalmiya] had a discussion but Dalmiya didn't give him any assurance," he said.

Candidates interested in the job need to apply, after which they will make a presentation and be interviewed by board officials and former India captains. Dalmiya, however, isn't revealing his cards yet. "Wait for 10-odd days and you will get know," he told the Indian Express.

### 'Hamilton didn't bully'

AGENCIES, Shanghai

A Chinese Grand Prix podium hostess who had champagne sprayed in her face by race winner Lewis



Hamilton has played down the incident after the Formula One world champion was accused of sexist bullying.

"It lasted for only one or two seconds, and I didn't think too much about it," Liu Siying, a 22-year-old graduate of the Shanghai Institute of Visual Art who works for a real estate company, told the Shanghai Daily.

"I think some foreign media are more sensitive about the topic than local media," she added. "I was just told by my employer to stand on the podium, and that's what I did."

### Phelps sets sights on Rio

REUTERS, New York

Michael Phelps will not compete at the World Championships but the 18-time gold medalist will attempt to add to his Olympic legacy by competing at next year's Rio Games.

Since coming out of retirement two years ago there had been widespread speculation Phelps, considered the greatest swimmer of all-time, was targeting a comeback at Rio although the 29-year-old American did not confirm that until Wednesday.

"You guys heard it here first," Phelps said in a story on the BBC website. "I am looking forward to next year. I don't think it's too hard to really realise why I came back."

## Unfairness from BCB

SPORTS REPORTER

Tickets were all sold out but numerous empty seats painted a different picture in a 25,000 capacity stadium. This has been a common scenario in the last few years. Will it be the case when the first ODI between Bangladesh and Pakistan takes place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today?

There is a possibility of a similar scenario again at the home of Bangladesh cricket in Mirpur because of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's peculiar policy, which has been depriving the paying public from getting hold of the much-sought after tickets.

As per UCBL officials, the vendor for selling tickets, they have got 45 per cent tickets for the first ODI, which were sold within two days.

But believe it or not, the BCB reserves the remaining 55 per cent of tickets, which is 13,750 for different stakeholders. It is not understandable why the board is keeping such a big volume for 'complementary' beneficiaries at the expense of the paying fans.

There was a time when the board actually kept 25 per cent tickets for its corporate clients, affiliated club and district officials and former cricketers. But the popularity of cricket has unfortunately increased complementary stakeholders, who are growing like mushrooms following a lax or to some extent politically motivated attitude from the board.

It's pathetic to see the seats vacant as many 'dignitaries' don't turn up, denying a real fan, whose sleepless night in queues could not permit him to get hold of a precious ticket and that too with his own hard-earned money.

"The range of dignitaries is increasing day by day," fumed a BCB official, who wished not to be named. But this statement only suggests that the board is certainly not playing proper cricket off the field.

## 'They're favourites'

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan coach Waqar Younis echoed Shakib Al Hasan's sentiments and termed Bangladesh as favourites for the upcoming ODI series.

He however said that shedding off the favourites tag would do his young side a great deal of good.

"Yes they are favourites," said Waqar at the pre-match press conference at Mirpur yesterday.

"I guess he [Shakib] said that because he feels that we are a young side. We don't mind that. We are in a transition and we have come here after a while. If he is confident, fair enough; but we are not lacking anything. We have got a very disciplined side and we have got guys who can win games so it's just a matter of exposing them in the main level," added the former Pakistan pacer.

Waqar was a member of the Pakistan squad that lost their only ODI against Bangladesh back in 1999.

Pakistan have ever since won each and every time the two teams faced. He however expects a different battle this time around.

"I still remember everything about 1999 because that was the

only game I played in that World Cup.

Bangladesh beat us in every department in that game. Since then we have had a lot of success against them but I am not going to say that that's going to happen again because Bangladesh have developed into a very fine side, as we saw in the last World Cup."

Pakistan skipper Azhar Ali ech-



PHOTO: STAR

Pakistan captain Azhar Ali (R), sitting next to his coach Waqar Younis, speaks of a 'challenging' series against the Tigers.

oed Waqar's sentiments and also brushed aside the defeat that they encountered against a second-string Bangladeshi outfit on Wednesday.

"I am very happy with the way Bangladesh A played. They played positively in a great atmosphere and they gave us the best possible practice," said Azhar.

## Asia Cup to switch formats

AFP, New Delhi

Cricket's Asia Cup will switch from the one-day format to Twenty20 next year with the format of future tournaments matching that of the subsequent World Cup, a top official said Thursday.

The next edition of the regional showpiece will be held as a T20 event for the first time, ahead of the World Twenty20 in India in March-April next year, the official said.

Then in 2018, it will be a one-day tournament because the 50-overs-a-side World Cup will be played in England in 2019, outgoing Asian Cricket Council (ACC) CEO Ashraf Haq told AFP.

The Asia Cup has been played with the 50-overs-a-side format since it began in 1984.

"The changed formats are confirmed but the host nation for next year's tournament and the dates have not yet been decided," Haq added.

The upcoming Asia Cup is likely to be a six-nation event, with the big four -- India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh -- being joined by two non-Test nations.

Afghanistan took part in the previous tournament in Bangladesh last year which was won by Sri Lanka.

Haq confirmed that the Kuala Lumpur-based ACC will shut shop by June 30 and the International Cricket Council will take over its operations, including the conduct of the Asia Cup.

"The ICC will now look after the development of cricket in Asia," said Haq.