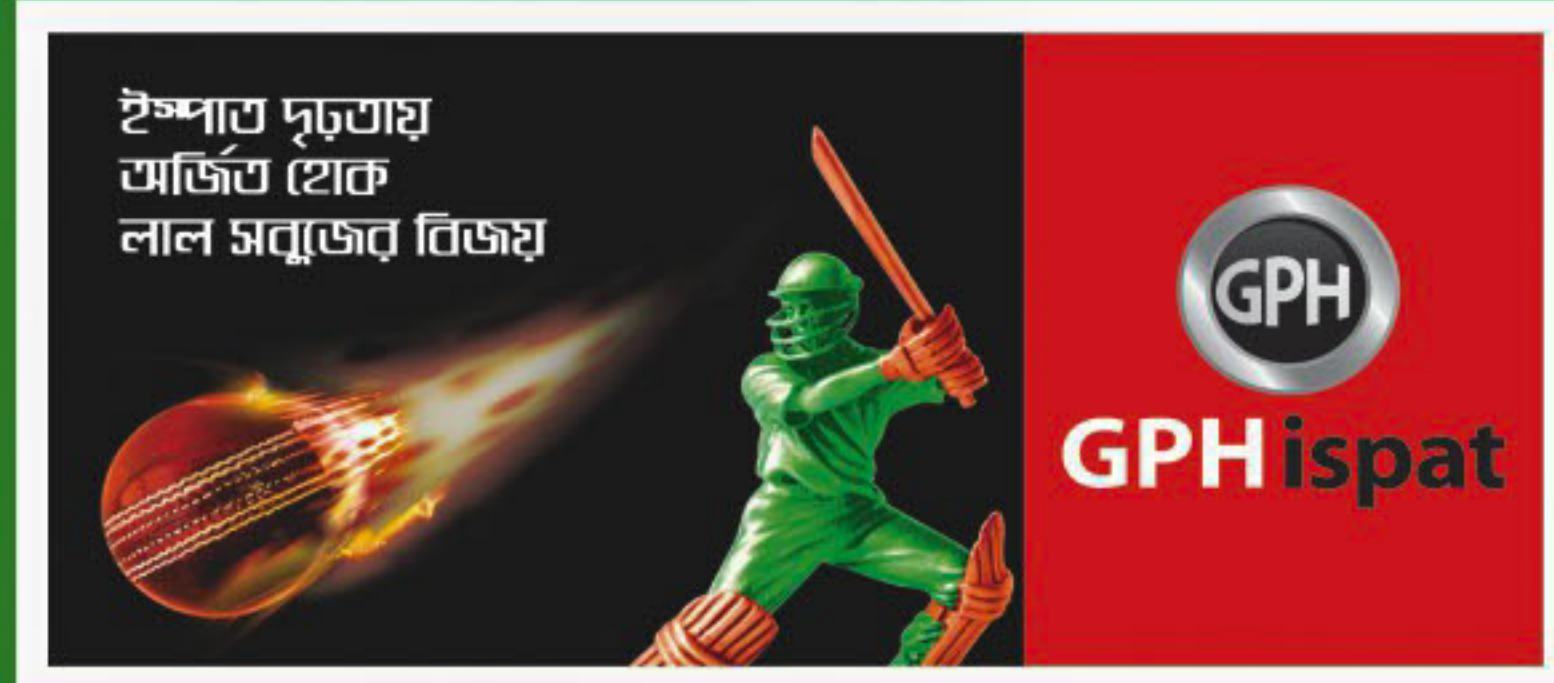


SPORT



NEW ERA BEGINS HERE



'Don't take it otherwise'

"Is that so?" exclaimed Tamim Iqbal with a curious smile when a reporter mistakenly said that Shakib Al Hasan supported the manner of his celebration on Friday night after his hundred. "Shakib can't say that because he is fan of Messi [Lionel Messi] and I am of Cristiano Ronaldo," he joked, while making the correction that it was actually Mushfiqur Rahim who voiced his support. His yet another style of celebration has dominated discussions in different forums and a relieved Tamim gave his version along with other issues while talking with The Daily Star's Bishwajit Roy at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday. Below are the excerpts from the long discussion:

Question (Q): Please tell us about your much-talked about celebration?

Tamim (T): I am a fan of Ronaldo and I did it in Ronaldo style. I never make pre-planned celebration. I did not do it to hurt anybody or show anybody, it actually came spontaneously. I request everybody not to take it negatively. When someone goes through a bad time, he may do something which should not be done and frustration can seep out. Don't take it otherwise. Only I know what a bad time I went through and that's why it came from my heart.

Q: It wasn't long ago that you made 95 but still faced criticism. How do you look at this issue?

T: You cannot avoid criticism and I have no problem with that. People praise me for good performances and criticise for bad performances. It's natural. But please don't make any personal attacks. I have to face a lot of personal attacks, even against my family which I cannot explain to you and as a human being I cannot take it. It is natural that sometimes I can fulfill the expectations and sometimes I cannot. There is no problem if people criticise me regarding cricketing issues.

Q: Was it a special hundred?



T: Of course. I was under pressure. I must thank my teammates who wholeheartedly supported me when I was not scoring. Especially, Mashrafe bhai and Mushfiq always stood behind me and their support helped me play this knock. One cannot feel any better, as I made a hundred and my team won the match. Ultimately I am happy that I could contribute to my team.

Q: Tell us about how you planned your innings.

T: What I believe is that I batted really well in the first ten overs which was the best part of my innings. Then there were spells from Saeed Ajmal and Wahab Riaz, who bowled really well and at that time we could not score runs, but we did well not to give away a wicket. Mushfiq and I both had the confidence that we could make it up. When you make a hundred, you have to go through different phases and big players also follow that design. Life would be easy for any batsman with the way Mushfiq played his innings from the very first delivery.

Q: There have been a lot of questions regarding your fitness. How do you feel about that?

T: Yes, there are scopes to improve my fitness, but everybody should understand that I just recovered from a knee operation, so it will take time. But I know if I can improve my fitness level, it will help my batting.

Q: Putting aside the criticism from outside, are you satisfied with your performances?

T: I am yet to reach the standard which I set for myself. I never portray myself as a big player, because I didn't do much yet. I have got the potential, so I should have done much better, but I have failed to justify my potential so far. Sometimes I get frustrated, but if I can achieve my goal in the next one or two years then everything will change. Hopefully I will be able to fulfill my dream.



The Tigers were in a chirpy mood at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday, a day after their dominating 79-run victory against Pakistan in the first one-day international.

PHOTO: FROZ AHMED

History or a turnaround?

NAIMUL KARIM



It's amazing what good rhythm can do for the Tigers. It tends to give them a new identity, a new realisation. Take the World Cup for instance. They went into it having lost 12 out of their first 13 ODIs in 2014 and their prospects of making it through to the quarterfinals seemed more than just dim.

However, an exemplary performance against Scotland changed all that. What followed next was a heroic turnaround against England and a close contest

against hosts New Zealand. 2013 was no different either; with a series win against the West Indies at home leading the Tigers to a rare ODI win against Sri Lanka in their own den.

On Friday, Bangladesh beat Pakistan for the first time in 16 years and talks regarding a series win have already begun dominating different forums. It doesn't matter that this was the same side that the Tigers failed to beat despite having come agonisingly close on so many occasions. It doesn't matter that this is the side that once included players whom some of the Tigers referred to as

their inspiration.

All that seems to be a thing of the past now, as the Tigers look to hunt their first series win against Pakistan at Mirpur today. While the Tigers did have a good day on the field, there are still certain grey areas which they will be looking to improve upon. One of those would be the way they played in between overs number 10 and 20 on Friday; they scored just 23 runs and lost two wickets.

One of the main reasons behind that was the lack of singles taken by Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad. That scenario however changed as soon as

Mushfiqur Rahim entered the crease. Pacer Abul Hasan, who leaked 42 runs in five overs, is likely to be replaced by skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza today.

The visitors may be down, but they are far from being dusted. Pakistan have a habit of striking in the most unexpected scenarios and if the Tigers think that they are an easy match away from a historic series win, that would be a mistake.

This young side has a bunch of players who can change the game around anytime. Captain Azhar Ali led from the front on Friday with a half-century. Young

Mohammad Rizwan, who scored 67 off 58 in the game, seems a nifty player and could do better with a bit more experience.

However, for a comeback they will need their fielders to support their bowlers. They were torn apart by Tamim and Mushfiqur in the first match, but things could have been different had the visitors grasped the opportunities presented to them early on.

Can Pakistan's new-look side make a contest out of this series? Or will Bangladesh create history tonight? Either way, an exciting day of cricket is in store.



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, a 24-carat Tiger, will be back at the helm in the second ODI against Pakistan today.

PHOTO: STAR

'Friday, we were almost perfect'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza may not have been in the playing eleven in Bangladesh's win against Pakistan on Friday, but he was very much vocal within the team's dressing room. He was one of the first ones to congratulate both Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim as they returned to the dressing room.

Speaking to reporters yesterday in the pre-match press conference for today's second ODI, Mashrafe said that he was proud to be a part of this team.

"I think we played an almost perfect match on Friday. The players rarely committed mistakes. Maybe we could have bowled better, but the wicket we played on was meant for 300 runs. I hope we can continue the same way in the next game," the 31-year-old hopped.

The skipper further praised the two batsmen who took the game away from the tourists.

"I always said that it was only a matter of time before Tamim played a big knock. The amount of hard work he has been putting in the nets lately... the result was bound to come. Now we should all pray that he can hold on to his form because playing well in just one match is not everything," said Mashrafe.

Describing Mushfiqur as a run-machine, Mashrafe praised the batsman's

'desire to do well'. "Only class batsmen around the world score runs so consistently. He hasn't been getting as much focus and maybe that's good for him. Hopefully he can continue his good run. Whether there's practice or not, Mushfiqur always attends a net session and it shows how hardworking he is. It's his desire that has brought him here today," said Mashrafe.

Following the win, there were talks in the social media about how this Pakistani side was an 'ordinary' team without their experienced players. Mashrafe however was of a different opinion.

"I don't think this team is ordinary. Their current bowling side I think is better than the one that played in the World Cup. Yes they don't have Misbahul Haq, Ahmed Shehzad and Shahid Afridi. Afridi won many games against us... that is true. However, I don't think they are too far behind us in terms of their balance. Players retire... it may just take them a while before they can arrange themselves again," explained Mashrafe.

When asked the 'customary' question with regards to hopes of a possible white-wash, Mashrafe brushed it aside, saying it would create unnecessary pressure if one were to think of a 3-0 win at the moment. "All we are focusing on right now is the next game. We want to win that," he said.

Gul replaces injured Adil

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket team have suffered another injury on their tour of Bangladesh after paceman Ehsan Adil was ruled out due to a hamstring injury, an official said Saturday.

Adil's injury is the fourth setback for Pakistan after batsman Sohaib Maqsood (arm fracture) and fast bowler Sohail Khan (back injury) were ruled out before the tour began, while leg-spinner Yasir Shah injured his thumb in a practice match prior to the one-day series.

Adil was not a part of the playing XI in the opening match of the three-ODI series on Friday.

Adil, 22, returned home later Saturday while Gul will fly to Dhaka the same night.

Gul was named earlier for the Twenty20 to be played on April 24.

Inzy blames lack of int'l cricket

PTI, Karachi

Former captain Inzamamul Haq has blamed the lack of international cricket at home since 2009 for the declining standards in Pakistan cricket.

"The present situation in Pakistan cricket is worrisome and everyone needs to give serious thought to it," Inzamam told the media on Saturday in his hometown Multan.

"We lost to Bangladesh on Friday and that too after 16 long years so that is a clear indication of where our cricket is going unless something is done to improve things," said Inzamam, who has played 120 Tests and 378 ODIs.

IN A NUTSHELL

'I never asked for Rs 16 crore'

INTERNET, Delhi

The highest buy of Indian Premier League 2015, Yuvraj Singh was bought by Delhi Daredevils at a humongous amount of 16 crore rupees in the players' auction. However though, the player believes that there is no pressure on him of that value because he never asked for any amount.

"I never asked for it [16 crore rupees]. It was not in my hands. I was just like any other player in the auction. I would have played in the IPL irrespective of the amount as my priority has always been playing cricket."

Hafeez results next week?

INTERNET, New Delhi

Pakistan's off-spinning all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez, amid much secrecy, underwent 'official' testing on his modified bowling action at the ICC-accredited Sri Ramachandra Institute of Sports Sciences in the Indian capital recently.

The Hindu yesterday reported that the results



could be out next week. If his action is cleared, he will be able to bowl again in international cricket.

Hafeez earlier visited the city in December 2014, for an 'unofficial' test which he failed to clear. Those tests also gave him an indication of the areas to work on.

He has been working on his action at Pakistan's National Cricket Academy but, reportedly, he has been bowling slower through the air from a more side-on position.

Lord's set for renovation

INTERNET, London

The latest phase of the 'Master-plan' redevelopment of Lord's was unveiled on Friday with a scheme to replace the "tired" Allen and Tavern stands in the south-west corner of the self-styled 'home of cricket'.

Marylebone Cricket Club, owner of the celebrated ground in north-west London, intends to build a single new structure in their place with more than 5,500 seats -- taking the overall capacity to nearly 30,000.

BD under-19s secure series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket is going through a purple patch. While the Tigers followed their impressive performances in the World Cup by beating Pakistan after sixteen years on Friday night, their juniors confirmed a series victory against reigning ICC World Under-19 champions South Africa with two matches in hand yesterday in Chittagong.

Mohammad Saifuddin, a pacer from Feni, claimed five wickets for 27 runs to set up an eight-run victory for the home team in the fifth Youth ODI, to give his side an unassailable 4-1 lead in the seven-match series at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in the port city.

The strong top order batting first saw the home side post a fighting total of 257 for nine in their share of 50 overs after deciding to bat first. Opener Pinak Ghosh hit a team high 76 off 116 balls with four boundaries and two sixes, while Mehedy Hasan chipped in with 63 off 73 balls -- a knock that featured six boundaries. Ziyaad Abraham was the Proteas' most successful bowler with 6 for 58.

In reply, the visitors recovered from early setbacks to reach a good position with 201 for five in 41.5 overs, but man of the match Saifuddin took some quick wickets to snatch a narrow win for the home side.

The sixth match will take place at the same venue on April 21.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH UNDER-19S: 257-9 in 50 overs (Saif 33, Pinak 76, Shanto 21, Mehedy 63, Shaiful 27; Abraham 6-58)

SOUTH AFRICA UNDER-19S: 249-9 in 50 overs (Moonsamy 63, Mulder 50, Zorzi 41, Galiem 60; Saifuddin 5-27)

Result: Bangladesh Under-19s won by eight runs.