



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) and his South Africa counterpart Faf du Plessis pose for photographers with the glittering piece of glory on the eve of the two-match T20 series yesterday. The first T20I will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

Time to write a new chapter

BISHWAJIT ROY



Can buoyant Bangladesh rewrite history again? The Tigers have scripted new chapters against two mighty neighbours -- Pakistan and India -- in the last two series and now the perception is there that they stand before their biggest challenge, as they enter the battlefield of Mirpur against formidable South Africa today for the first T20I of the two-match series.

It would have been better had the three-match ODI series kicked things off because, as everyone knows, the Tigers' gung-ho attitude in the 50-over version has brought them success. And who doesn't know how crucial it is to make a good start to a series, especially when the home side is banking on the confidence that has come through their recent ODI successes?

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and company however should not focus on anything other than the challenge in front of them, in the form of a team which has every weapon in their arsenal. When a team sets its target to become one of the major forces in world cricket, they must overcome every challenge. It's the fearless approach which has taken Bangladesh cricket to new heights in recent times and the positive brand of cricket they have displayed since the World Cup can only help them in their mission to etch a new chapter in the history books against South Africa.

Except for the 2007 World Cup victory against the Proteas, Bangladesh have hardly been able to compete against them in any format of the game. And when the sides last

met in the 2011 World Cup, the Tigers embraced a humiliating defeat in their own den, being bowled out for just 78 runs.

But under Mashrafe's leadership and Chandika Hathurusingha's guidance, the Tigers have given the world cricket fraternity the impression that this side has the ability to soar into a new horizon and leave the past in the past. And they can enhance their reputation by putting on brave faces against South Africa during the series, which comprises two T20Is, three ODIs and two Tests.

Mashrafe, being his usual bold self at the pre-match press conference yesterday, said that he gave less importance to T20 cricket, but mentioned that his team could set the tone for the entire series by playing good cricket in the T20Is.

The Tigers should ascertain that their batting is better than the last series from the start, though the captain reiterated his mantra of 'bowlers win matches'.

Bangladesh's first-ever series win against India was one of their biggest achievements, but it was understandably mentioned from the Bangladesh camp that their performances in that series were not as good as the showing against Pakistan. And it was attributed to the lack of fire in their batting. A common problem was that many had gotten starts but could not move forward.

In another aspect, the new playing conditions for limited-overs cricket will be enforced from today. While Bangladesh have expressed happiness with the changes, it's now time to see how they adjust to those and how they capitalise on their confidence.

'Better stay at home if you are scared'

NAIMUL KARIM

For the third time this year, Bangladesh will feature in a series against a side that has an overwhelming record against them. And for the third time this year, the hosts will be looking to defy numbers and statistics, as they take on South Africa in the first T20I at Mirpur today.

Seven innings victories out of eight Tests, two 400-plus stands -- one of which is a world record, the failure to bowl the Proteas out at home in an ODI and so on. There are several statistics, which point towards South Africa's sheer dominance against Bangladesh.

But skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza wasn't worried about all that. His demeanour in yesterday's pre-match press conference in Mirpur exuded confidence.

"They haven't seen us play, but we see them all the time. I don't think they have time to see us either," chuckled Mashrafe.

"The only option that we have is to

play confidently. There is no other option. If we feel scared then it's better to remain at home. Yes, you can be a little scared but that should help you perform. I think we should keep fear outside the field and just concentrate on our own performance. That's it.

"Yes record-wise we are in a bad situation. But that is a thing of the past. Now we are playing well as a team. I am not saying that we will definitely

fared well in T20 competitions back home.

South Africa's uncapped leg-spinner Eddie Leie for instance topped the wickets column in a domestic T20 tournament recently and looked good in the practice match at Fatullah on Friday.

While being aware of that fact, Mashrafe was confident that his side would be able to overcome the threat.

"They can restrict us in all three departments. They are ahead of us. We have one T20 player going around the world and they have players who are yet to make their international debuts and have already made marks in T20 leagues.

"However, these are just statistics. I believe that if we can hold on to our game, we can achieve positive results.

T20 cricket is all about guts, freedom and good thinking and we have all that," said a confident Mashrafe.

"We have to start well. There is a bit of confidence from the previous series, yes, but the result of this series will depend on how we start it," he added.

achieve a lot, but we have done well. We beat Pakistan in our last T20I," added the confident skipper.

Unlike Bangladesh, South Africa have sent a side that seems to be specialised in T20s. A bunch of them are already regulars in T20 competitions around the world, whereas others have

achieved a lot, but we have done well. We beat Pakistan in our last T20I," added the confident skipper.

Unlike Bangladesh, South Africa have sent a side that seems to be specialised in T20s. A bunch of them are already regulars in T20 competitions around the world, whereas others have



'Please spare locker room'

SPORTS REPORTER

Players' dressing rooms are considered sacred places and without a doubt privacy has to be given the highest priority there. Unfortunately, that's not the case when it comes to the Tigers' dressing room, which recently looked like it was a free-entry area.

And it was none other than Bangladesh's one-day and T20 captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who expressed his concerns over the issue yesterday.

"At the end of our last match [against India], a lot of people came inside the ground, possibly from outside. Foreign players will feel insecure if such things keep happening. I saw it happen in the last series. I am sure those in charge of security will look into it. All of us should maintain discipline. Everyone wants such things to end through discussions, before the series [against South Africa] begins," demanded Mashrafe at the start of the pre-match press conference yesterday at Mirpur.

At the end of the final ODI between Bangladesh and India a large number of people entered the ground and some even entered the dressing room's viewing area.

Mashrafe also expressed regret over yesterday's incident, when a journalist covering the current series was assaulted by security personnel.

"It is quite unfortunate that someone was physically assaulted. It is not desirable."

BCB media committee chairman Jalal Yunus also apologised for the incident later.

"We are sorry that such an incident occurred. It is certainly unexpected and we will ensure that there is a permanent solution and there is no such occurrence in the future."

McCullum sets record

APP, London

New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum's explosive hitting saw him set a new record in the English T20 Blast competition on Friday with a blistering 158 not out off 64 balls for his county Warwickshire.

The 33-year-old flayed the Derbyshire attack, bringing his century up off 42 balls and his final total equalled a previous score he hit for Kolkatta Knight Riders in the first-ever IPL match in 2008 -- that one coming off 73 balls.

McCullum's innings -- which included 11 sixes and 11 fours -- is the second highest T20 score ever, behind West Indian batsman Chris Gayle's 175 in the Indian Premier League in 2013.

McCullum, who recently signed a one-year extension to his contract with the Kiwis, broke the previous mark of 153 set by Luke Wright for Sussex in 2014.



Get AB de Villiers out as early as possible and that will make South Africa press the panic button.

Drink-driving charges for Faulkner

APP, London

Australia all-rounder James Faulkner accepted he had made an "error of judgement" after being charged with drink-driving by Greater Manchester Police while playing for English county side Lancashire.

The 25-year-old has been released on bail and now faces a court hearing in Manchester on July 21.

Cricket Australia, who have charged the World Cup winner under its own code of conduct, "returned a blood alcohol reading of approximately twice the UK's legal limit".

"I can't excuse my actions and understand that I have let people down," Faulkner said in a Cricket Australia statement. "My decision to drive was an error in judgement."

"I apologise unreservedly and accept any penalty handed to me by Cricket Australia and the relevant authorities."