

SPORT



TOUGHEST OF 'EM ALL

শ্রদ্ধাশ্রম দ্বিতীয় অর্জিত থেকে লাল সর্বাঙ্গের বিজয়



GPH ispat



If Bangladesh are to get back to winning ways against South Africa today, Mushfiqur Rahim (above) and Sabbir Rahman (inset) will have to hit form in the second T20I at Mirpur.

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED



Will the Tigers batsmen fire?

SPORTS REPORTER



It may just be a T20 series, but of all the tests that this Bangladesh cricket team have faced this year, the match at Mirpur today may just be the most difficult of them. At the moment, the limited-overs team is in a scenario that they have never been in during the last two series.

Against Pakistan, the win in the first ODI took them all the way through. Against India too, a winning start paved the way for a historic series victory. In the World Cup as well, the wins against Afghanistan and Scotland helped them put up gut-wrenching performances against England and New Zealand.

However, at the moment, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's men face a different challenge. They lost the last match against India and were thumped in the first T20I against South Africa. The latest challenge for this record-defying team is to figure out if they can shrug off the jitters of a bad start and comeback to draw the series.

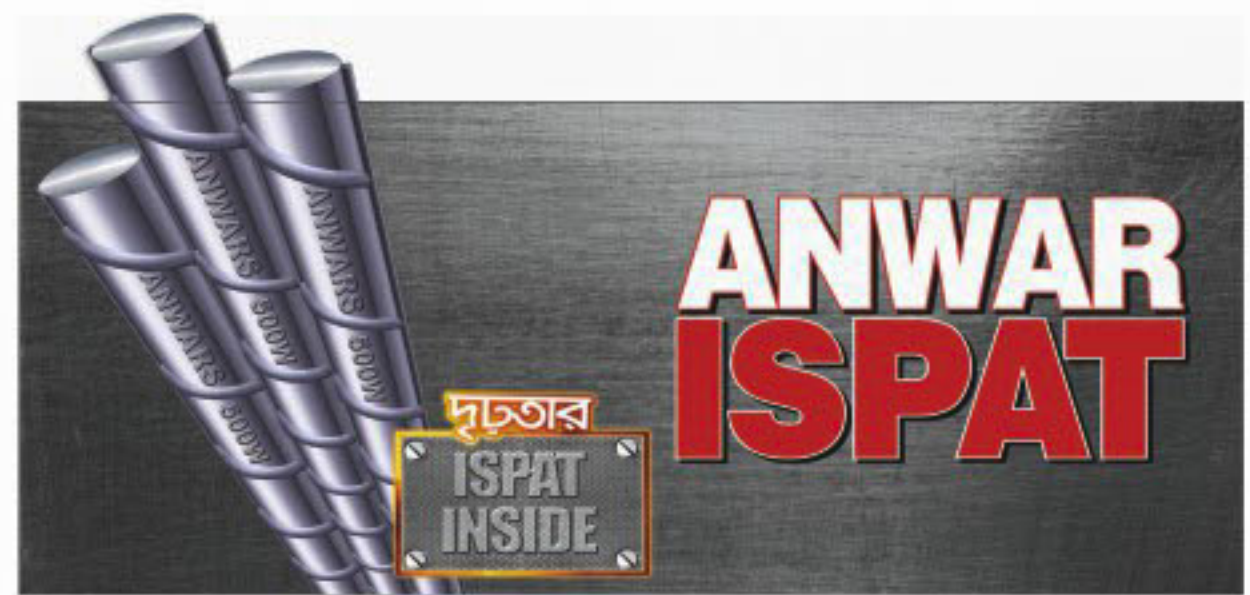
The 'draw' factor of course isn't the big factor here. The hosts will be hoping they can snatch a win in a bid to go into the ODIs on a winning note.

And for that to happen, Bangladesh will need their batsmen to fire. Their batsmen were the key reason behind their dominating performance against Pakistan and the good start to the India series. However, things haven't been the same in the last two matches.

The key really is to merely adjust to the slow and low wicket at Mirpur, as opposed to the sporting tracks laid down here in the last two series. The likes of Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar cannot just throw their bat to every other delivery.

They can perhaps take a lesson or two from Faf du Plessis who had scored a match-winning half-century on Sunday. Oddly enough, the South Africa skipper seemed like the only comfortable batsman on the pitch in the first T20I.

Like the first match, the battle of spin, in all likelihood, will continue. South Africa's bowling line-up did quite well in the last match, however, they may just tinker with it a bit in a bid to provide their youngsters with an opportunity. It won't be a surprise if they plan to include leg-spinner Eddie Leie



into their attack. The pitch after all, is likely to be similar to the one that was used on Sunday.

Bangladesh also may think about including their own leg-spinner, Jubair Hossain, into the line-up. Comeback bowler Shohag Gazi went wicket-less in the first match and that might just compel the team management to make the move.

There weren't any official training sessions by either team yesterday. However, a few players did attend the optional sessions. One of them was Mushfiqur Rahim. The wicketkeeper-batsman, who played a key role in holding the middle order together in the Pakistan series, has been going through a lean patch recently.

While he helped the Tigers break his side's rut against Pakistan, the Tigers will hope that he can regain his form for the new challenge ahead.

'Toss will be key'

SPORTS REPORTER



South Africa's bowling coach Charl Langeveldt must have been a happy man on Sunday. His bowlers had outdone the Bangladeshi batsmen on a wicket that not many of the Proteas were used to playing on.

The spinners induced plenty of turn, while the pacers managed to punch in bouncers despite a sticky wicket. Regardless of the thumping victory in the first match though, Langeveldt remained cautious with regards to the second. According to him, the toss could play a vital role in the second T20I as well.

"Yesterday [Sunday] had we batted second we would have struggled as well. In the second innings the wicket deteriorated. I think it depends a lot on the surface of the wicket. And I think tomorrow [Tuesday] will probably be the same. We will see the wicket and take a decision," said Langeveldt when asked if the visitors were planning on bringing changes to their squad.

"If you lose the toss you never know what will happen but I think it was a good start for us on Sunday. We expect the Bangladesh team to come hard at us. And I think we need to uplift our game ten per cent," he added.

Langeveldt, who only recently joined South Africa's coaching panel, described Sunday's victory as a good omen for the T20 World Cup. He hopes that the T20 series here can help him find the perfect combination before the mega event, set to take place in India next year.

"Maybe for the T20 World Cup our skills need to improve. It's not a hundred per cent yet. It's a work in progress. We have got a young attack, so it's nice. We have come here to get the guys experienced with the subcontinent and I hope they can execute their plan in the next game as well," said the South African.



CHARL LANGEVELDT

'Need to bat longer'

SPORTS REPORTER



In the last few months Bangladesh's batting line-up has been blessed with a number of talented youngsters who aren't afraid to wield their bats.

Ever since Sabbir Rahman smacked two powerful sixes on his debut against Zimbabwe, there have been talks about the immense power that he possesses and how he could very well be Bangladesh's most destructive T20 batsman in the near future. He displayed his capability during a practice match against Pakistan when his lofty century helped the hosts to an unexpected win. Litton Das may have just begun his career, but he too seems to have plenty of potential.

And then there's Soumya Sarkar, a player whose batting approach has been compared by many to the one of Sourav Ganguly's. Soumya's century against Pakistan in the third ODI of that series left the visitors devastated and the hosts in awe.

However, despite having potential, they still seem to lack the perseverance to play bigger innings more consistently.

Take for instance the case of Sabbir. In 17 matches he has had one half-century, but batted at an average of 35.

While playing down the order may restrict him from scoring big knocks, the problem though is that he tends to lose his way after getting set. Against India for instance, he got out twice after reaching 40s and on both occasions he was timing the ball really well.

Soumya seems to be having a similar problem. In 13 matches, the left-hander has been dismissed six times between the scores of 15 and 30. It just goes on to show that he is yet to learn to convert those knocks on a regular basis.

It's an aspect that the left-hander admitted to be working on behind the scenes.

"I understand the problem. This is bad for me... getting out frequently after getting set. Rather than feeling bad for myself I feel worse for the team. I am working on that," said Soumya at the pre-match press conference at the team hotel yesterday.

Crediting Sunday's defeat to the failure of the batsmen, Soumya hoped that the hosts would comeback on Tuesday.

"Our plan was to score 40-50 runs without any wicket in the first six overs. But we lost two quick wickets and never managed to recover from that. Hopefully our plan will work in the next T20I. We need to win that and keep the momentum going into the ODIs," said Soumya.



South Africa's ODI opener Hashim Amla and four other players joined the Proteas tour party at the team hotel in Dhaka yesterday evening.

PHOTO: STAR

Proteas' ODI stars in town

SPORTS REPORTER

Members of South Africa's ODI team reached Dhaka yesterday evening. While most of the ODI players are already in Dhaka, taking part in the T20I series, there were five players who landed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 5:20 pm.

Hashim Amla, Morne Morkel, Imran Tahir, Farhaan Berhardien and Ryan McLaren are the players who arrived yesterday. After the T20Is, the two teams will face off in a three-match one-day international series that begins in Mirpur on Friday.

The second ODI will take place at the same venue on Sunday. After that, the teams will travel to Chittagong to play the third and final ODI at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Following the limited-overs series, the teams will also play two Tests with the first match taking place in the port city.

Pakistan fight back

AFP, Pallekele



Shan Masood and Younis Khan compiled unbeaten centuries to keep Pakistan in the hunt for a landmark victory in the series-deciding third and final Test against Sri Lanka on Monday.

Set a challenging target of 377 runs, the tourists recovered from a shaky 13-2 to move to 230 without further loss by stumps on the rain-free fourth day in Pallekele.

Masood, the five-Test old left-hander, was unbeaten on 114, having reached his maiden century by lofting off-spinner Tharindu Kaushal for a six over long-on towards the end of play.

Younis, who made his 100th Test appearance in the second match of the series, got to his 30th century in the day's last over. The pair has put on 217 so far for the third wicket with Younis on 101.

Pakistan will enter the final day's play on Tuesday needing a further 147 runs with

eight wickets in hand on a wearing, but easy-paced pitch at the Pallekele International Stadium.

If Pakistan win, it will be the first time a visiting team will have scored more than 300 runs in the fourth innings to win a Test on Sri Lankan soil.

Pakistan's highest successful chase is 314 runs they made against Australia to win the Karachi Test way back in 1994.

Earlier, Sri Lanka's captain Angelo Mathews was last man out for 122 as the hosts took their overnight score of 228-5 to 313 before they were all out at the stroke of lunch.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 278

PAKISTAN: First innings 215

SRI LANKA: Second innings 313 all out (Tharanga 48, Mathews 122, Mubarak 35, Chandimal 67; Rahat 2-82, Imran 5-58, Yasir 2-80)

PAKISTAN: Second innings 230 for 2 (Masood 114 not out, Younis 101 not out; Prasad 1-42, Lakmal 1-34)

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