

Tigers want their soul back

AL-AMIN

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SOUTH AFRICA TO BANGLADESH ODI CRICKET SERIES
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Bangladesh's defeats in the two T20 Internationals against South Africa or to some extent in the third one-dayer in the preceding series against India grossly summed up the batting failure of the Tigers.

Against India the Tigers may have felt a 300-plus score was too tough to chase down. But considering the wicket in that third ODI and the strength of the opponents' bowling attack, which was less glamorous than that of Pakistan's, it was expected that the Tigers' batting should have fared better than what it actually did.

Against the Proteas they were up against

300-plus score and chased down two 240-plus totals with more than ten overs to spare, suddenly went off track.

There are a few good reasons as to why an eloquent batting unit is falling apart. The general notion is that the Tigers refuse to change a gear or two depending on match situations, leading to their own downfall. In both the T20I games they were in a mad rush and lacked the necessary discipline.

But the crux of the problem has so far been a misfiring Mashfiqur. The little right-hander was the vital cog in the middle in Bangladesh's success story in the World Cup. He was in fabulous form against Pakistan, against whom he struck 106, 65 and an unbeaten 49.

But ever since he injured his finger during the first Test against Pakistan, he has been a picture of struggle. His records after that depict a dismal figure -- 14, 31 and 24 in three ODIs against India and struggling 17 and 19 against the Proteas.

Mashfiqur is the nucleus in Bangladesh's batting. The Tigers might have won the ODI series against India 2-1, but the fact is that the batting was not up to the mark in that series.

He is now going through bad times and it was evident in the last game where he deposited a full toss straight to the man at cover.

If the Tigers are to rediscover their batting fluency, they need this pocket dynamo to regain his belligerent self.

Dashing opener Tamim is the other batsman who needs to revisit his recent style of play. His effort of late, it appears, is to match a fluent Soumya shot by shot. But Tamim should do what he knows best and we believe it will do a world of good for a batsman who struck a double hundred not a long ago.

But a team that had a magnificent World Cup down under and followed it up with a seamless batting performance in a 3-0 Pakistan whitewash, where they had one

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149 and 170 respectively in the two T20Is on a slightly different wicket, where the spinners got good purchases. It is true that the South African bowling attack has got more variation and bite, but the impressive Tigers' batting line-up, which has got two good openers in Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar followed by a solid middle-order in Mashfiqur Rahim and Shabir Al Hasan and two good finishers in the likes of Sabbir Rahman and Nasir Hossain, was supposed to act more professionally to extend a fantastic home run.

But a team that had a magnificent World Cup down under and followed it up with a seamless batting performance in a 3-0 Pakistan whitewash, where they had one



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R) and his South Africa counterpart Hashim Amla pose for photographs with the trophy on the eve of the three-match ODI series yesterday. The first ODI will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: STAR

'It's all about process'

BISHWAJIT ROY

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A slow wicket without much turn is the preferred pitch for the Tigers against South Africa. As there was torrential rain yesterday and the rectangle was under covers, Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza did not get the chance to review the wicket along with the team think-tank.

But whatever the state of the pitch may be seemingly did not matter to the skipper, rather the Tigers leader was more focussed on maintaining the 'process'.

Mashrafe yesterday repeatedly said that his players were more keen on winning than following the 'process', which resulted in three huge losses in the last three matches -- the third ODI against India and two

T20Is against South Africa.

"We have gotten into the habit of winning matches since the World Cup. Everyone wants to win and, true enough, this is our job. But by focusing on wins too much, we forget the process through which we got the wins. We should go back to basics, and to the mentality through which we turned things around since the World Cup," said Mashrafe, while reflecting on his demand from the players.

After such a memorable performance against India, the focus should have been on young left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman, but the series has turned out to be a battle of spin due to the conditions. South Africa's spinners have already issued a warning in the T20 series that they can threaten Bangladesh's batting, while also making it clear that their batsmen

are well-equipped to handle the home side's slow bowlers.

"There is some confusion about the wicket. Saying that I mean our batsmen and bowlers have been doing well on true wickets since the World Cup. But we have to think about their pace attack. I think it is better not to think too much about the wicket. We have to keep our processes right," Mashrafe explained.

The skipper made it clear that they would also rely on their slower bowlers in the ODI series.

"If the opposition is weaker against spin than pace, then we will definitely want help from the wicket because we don't have a big turner of the ball. Our spinners rely on pace variations. In both T20Is the ball turned in the second innings and we batted second both times. But the wicket in a 50-over game won't break so easily. I still

expect our spinners to be a cut above their spinners," opined Mashrafe, adding that they have to handle their big name leg-spinner Imran Tahir.

Mahmudullah Riyad is likely to play the match and it would be interesting to see how the all-rounder responds after an extended break due to injury, but overall the batting should click. They must also prove that they had two bad days in the field.

During the press conference Mashrafe exuded confidence, but he was not ready to levy any importance to the Champions Trophy qualification.

"We have to ensure that we don't play outside of our usual process, as we did in the last two T20Is and the third ODI against India," he said, reiterating his belief in the 'process'.



The Tigers will need their champion batsman Mashfiqur Rahim to click in the first ODI against South Africa if they are to secure a win in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: STAR

'AB's absence is opportunity'

SPORTS REPORTER

NPOLY
NATIONAL POLYMER
SOUTH AFRICA TO BANGLADESH ODI CRICKET SERIES
WALTON

Hashim Amla, the South Africa captain, spoke like his silky batting while he was talking ahead of the first ODI of the three-match series at Mirpur yesterday. He showed respect to his opponents, who have been playing a good brand of cricket since the World Cup. But there was no shortage of confidence about his team's chances to beat a high-flying Bangladesh.

"We have been here quite a few times over the last few years so I think everyone has gained a lot of experience playing in the subcontinent. I have also played here and been fortunate to get some runs against Bangladesh. The other guys played well in the T20s and we hope to join these experiences into the series," said a confident Amla.

There have been a lot of talks about the battle of spin in the series, so the question also came to him, but he reminded everybody that his pace attack had also got the ability to do well in any

condition.

"It depends on the wicket like it did in the T20Is where spin played a major factor. Imran Tahir is one of the best spinners in the limited-over versions of the game, so it's great to have him back in our team and Phangi [Aaron Phangiso] has done extremely well for us.

"It is hard to say if there will be a battle of spin, traditionally South Africa have a very good seam attack and even though the wicket may turn, the seam bowlers can do well as well. So it will be a kind of mixture for us and we are excited to see how we manage that," responded Amla.

The South Africa skipper said: "Who won't miss AB de Villiers in the team?"

But he also believed it created a chance for somebody else to prove himself.

"We have a lot of new guys in the bowling attack. And AB is not around so it gives the batters an opportunity. So I think this type of thing is really healthy to go into a long season. I hope we will be seeing some good performances," said Rahane.

India-Zim 1st ODI today

AFP, Harare

India's fringe players will have the opportunity to showcase their talents when they take on an improving Zimbabwe side in a three-match one-day international series, which starts on Friday.

With India resting seven players for the tour, including one-day captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Test skipper Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane has been tasked with leading an inexperienced squad that possesses just 479 one-day caps -- 229 of which belong to recalled spinner Harbhajan Singh.

India's decision to bring a second-string side to Zimbabwe two years ago did not stop them from whitewashing the home side 5-0, and they will still be favourite to win the three ODIs and T20s on this short tour.

"It's a good opportunity for all of us to express ourselves. We're taking Zimbabwe very seriously," said Rahane.

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