

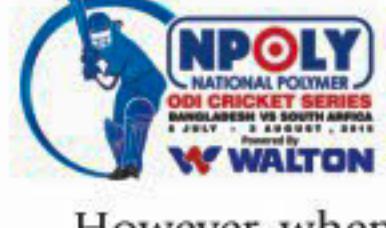


FINDING THE FAULTS? Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and coach Chandika Hathurusingha are on their knees as they give a long hard look at the Mirpur wicket, which has suddenly become a tough track to bat on for the Tigers, yesterday.



'Rabada isn't unplayable'

SPORTS REPORTER



The Tigers have had a terrific 2015. Right from the World Cup to the ODI series against India, everything seemed to click and come their way.

However, when they head to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today, they will be facing a different challenge. For the first time this year, the hosts will be feeling the heat.

Their lacklustre form preceding the World Cup meant that not many had expected them to do well. In fact, many reckoned that qualifying to the quarterfinals was a bonus. That was a performance that no doubt boosted Bangladesh cricket team's confidence levels throughout the year and led them to two emphatic series victories.

This time around though, the challenge will be to overturn the momentum. The batsmen aren't doing well and skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza doesn't seem to have many answers.

Bangladesh have traditionally been a team that thrives on momentum. However, a few defeats here and there tend to peg them back again. Mashrafe and company will hope that they can change this notion.

And for that, they will need their batters to fire -- a fact



that Nasir Hossain emphasised on during the pre-match press conference at Mirpur yesterday.

"The biggest thing is that our batsmen haven't been able to click. If we can score runs then I don't think there will be any problem. I think we had a bad day on the field in the last ODI. But rest assured nothing has changed. We are all confident," said Nasir.

"The series against India and Pakistan were different. The batsmen could just go and start hitting from ball one on those wickets. Here, you have to stay on the wicket for a while. We are trying to learn to spend more time on the wicket," he added.

The team's target, according to Nasir, will be to play 50 overs on a track that is expected to behave like the first ODI.

20-year-old Kagiso Rabada ripped through Bangladesh's batting in the first ODI. The youngster recorded the best-ever bowling figures by a player on debut and led the visitors to a thumping 8-wicket win.

Nasir though wasn't too taken aback by Rabada's performance.

"If you see Rabada's wickets there were a few soft dismissals such as Litton [Das] and Soumya [Sarkar]. He got one or two wickets with good deliveries. I don't think he is a kind of bowler whom we can't handle," said Nasir.

"We have the ability to beat South Africa and I think we just haven't been able to click. If our batsmen can click, we can beat them. If we can do everything according to plan then you will see that the entire scenario has changed," he added.

Hafeez the Pak hero

AFP, Dambulla



A dominant all-round performance by Mohammad Hafeez steered Pakistan to a six-wicket victory over Sri Lanka in the first one-day international in Dambulla on Saturday.

The off-spinner shrugged off concerns about his bowling action to grab four wickets as Pakistan, electing to field, kept Sri Lanka down to 255-8 in 50 overs.

Hafeez then hammered a stroke-filled 103 to lead the tourists past the target in 45.2 overs, giving them the lead in the five-match series.

Ninth-ranked Pakistan need to win the series to stay in contention for a place in the eight-nation Champions Trophy in England in 2017.

Sri Lanka, currently ranked fifth, are assured of taking part in the tournament.

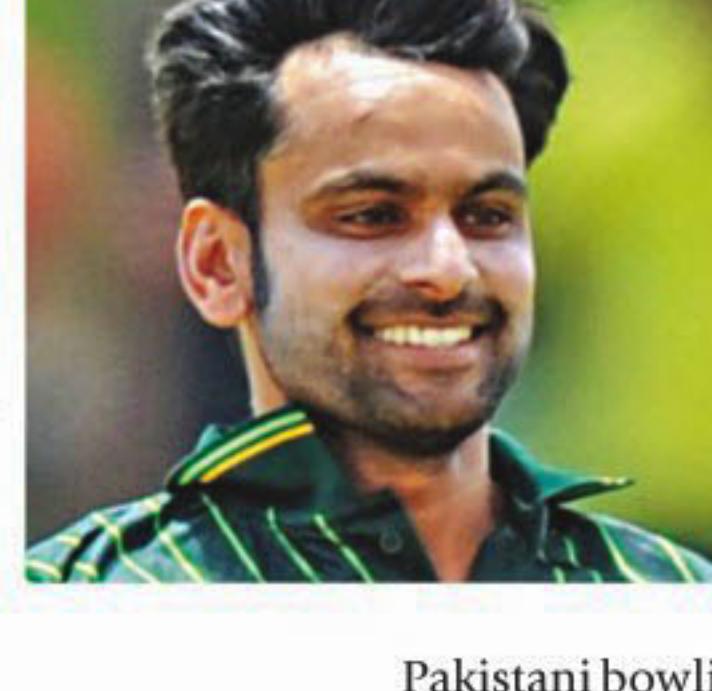
Hafeez, who was reported for a suspect action during the preceding Test series and underwent tests in Chennai last week, took the field only because he is allowed to play till the results are declared.

The 34-year-old seized the opportunity to finish with his best one-day figures of four for 41 and to restrict Sri Lanka in good batting conditions.

Hafeez returned with the bat to strike 10 boundaries and four sixes in his 10th one-day century -- the last four all coming against Sri Lanka.

Hafeez, later named player-of-the-match, said he had put aside the scrutiny of his bowling action.

"I have definitely put that aside and tried to concentrate on what is in my hands," he said. "This series is important for us and we



wanted to have a good start."

Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews admitted Pakistan outplayed his side.

"We did not play our best cricket," he said. "Hopefully we can comeback in the next few games. We need to prepare well mentally."

Pakistan lost captain Azhar Ali and opening partner Ahmed Shehzad by the 15th over with the score at 65, before Hafeez settled in to fashion a rescue.

He put on 58 for the third wicket with Babar Azam (25) and 75 for the fourth with Shoaib Malik, who ended the match with a six off Tillakaratne Dilshan to move to 55 not out.

Hafeez reached his century in the 36th over with a four off Thisara Perera, but fell two balls later when he gave the same bowler a tame return catch.

Earlier, Dinesh Chandimal top-scored with an unbeaten 65 off 68 balls as the Sri Lankans struggled to come to terms with the accurate Pakistani bowling.

Chandimal put on 82 for the fifth wicket with Mathews (38) and 40 for the seventh with debutant Milinda Siriwardana (22) after the first four batsmen had fallen for 118 by the 27th over.

The second one-dayer will be played there on Wednesday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: 255 for 8 in 50 overs (K Perera 26, Dilshan 38, Mathews 38, Chandimal 65 not out; Hafeez 4-41, Rahat 2-44)

PAKISTAN: 259 for 4 in 45.2 overs (Shehzad 29, Hafeez 103, Azam 25, Malik 55 not out; Lakmal 1-21, Mathews 1-22)

Result: Pakistan won by six wickets
Toss: Pakistan
Player-of-the-match: Mohammad Hafeez.

Miller cautious about series

SPORTS REPORTER

It has been a rather different tour for South Africa's middle-order batsman David Miller. He didn't get a chance to bat in the first ODI and the only time he spent a significant amount of time at the crease -- the second T20I -- saw him amble across for a cautious 28-ball 30.

It may not have been a typically aggressive innings, but he stayed on for the visitors till the very end and ensured that South Africa post a powerful total.

That's just how committed South Africa's batsmen have been throughout this tour so far. The wicket has seen a remarkable change from the series against India and Pakistan and the sole reason behind that was to test the visitors and not the Bangladeshi side," said Miller.

"It has always been a challenge in the sub-continent... to come here and get a good result. So we are proud of ourselves. These are tough conditions.

"I think we have been challenged. It has been tough conditions. Bangladesh are really playing well at the moment. [They have] obviously done well in the last couple of months. But for us... we just want to concentrate on what we need to do... just concentrating on the interior of our team and not the Bangladeshi side," said Miller.

"We would love to wrap up the series. But we have to concentrate on one ball at a time and cut it down into ten-over spaces. We just really bring it down to little targets in the game and finish them off. The results will come," said Miller.

"While the visitors are favourites to take the series in Mirpur today, Miller barely depicted a complacent vibe.

"They are definitely not going to go down without a fight. We know that they are going to be up for a good match tomorrow and we are as well. We know it is going to be great challenge," said Miller.

Batsmen like Faf du Plessis, Miller and Rilee Rossouw sweated it out in the middle and in the

end got their due dividends. While the scorecard of the tour suggests that the visitors are merely ambling through, the reality though is that they have had to really work hard to adjust to the heat and the wickets here.

And it's an aspect that Miller talked about during the pre-match press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"The Proteas have done that really well in the past and we would like to continue it this tour and months to come," said Miller.

While it's obvious that Miller and company will look to win the series today, the South African though was keener on taking the match phase by phase.

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