



Time to seal a dream 2015

Series-deciding 3rd ODI today

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong



Chandika Hathurusingha dropped his crutches on the ground, cautiously stretched his right foot forward and, with an imaginary bat in his hands, kept playing straight drives in front of Tamim Iqbal just as the left-hander was about to begin his batting session in Chittagong yesterday.

The effort taken by the coach, who required the support due to an injury, perhaps displayed how desperate he was to see his number one opener hit form again.

Tamim may not have been among the runs lately, but then again there's no better place than the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium to change that when Bangladesh take on South Africa in the third ODI -- the series decider -- today.

With 391, Tamim has scored the most number of runs in ODIs on this ground and Hathurusingha and co will hope that the left-hander rediscovered his form in his hometown in a crucial match against a very strong side to complete a series victory.

Shakib Al Hasan, during the pre-match press conference yesterday, described the match as a 'big opportunity' for Bangladesh; and when one looks at the statistics, the reasoning behind Shakib's choice of words was obvious.

Bangladesh have never beaten South Africa in a series. They have also never won a series against a team ranked in the top-eight after losing the first match. The only two occasions when they successfully managed to complete a comeback was against Zimbabwe in 2005 and 2009.

The stat depicts the defensive mindset that the Tigers had in the past when they were satisfied with a mere victory. However, things will be a lot different when Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's side take the field today.

The way the skipper marshalled his players in the second ODI suggested that there was only one target on his mind: a victory.

Seldom does one get to see a Bangladesh captain using all his strike bowlers before the 40th over of the match, but Mashrafe did exactly that. In his hunger for wickets and control of the game, the 29-year-old finished the quotas of Mustafizur Rahman and Shakib early and had an extra fielder inside the circle throughout most of the second ODI.

The last ODI was one of the rare occasions when Shakib had finished his ten overs before the 40th over mark. He had never done that in his first innings of an ODI while playing against a side ranked in the top eight.

The attacking mindset on the field in turn helped his batsmen -- who have been lacking confidence throughout the series -- romp to the small target.

South Africa leg-spinner Imran Tahir yesterday chose a different route from Shakib and referred to the deciding ODI as a challenge.

Having been outclassed in the second ODI, Tahir believed that a score of around 250 would be good enough on a Chittagong track which is -- like in the first two ODIs -- expected to aid spinners.

Considered a lucky ground for the hosts, Bangladesh have won nine out of their 15 ODIs here. While Tamim is the highest run-getter, Shakib is the highest wicket-taker. That stat might as well encourage the left-arm to get the two remaining wickets that he requires to become the second Bangladeshi bowler to scalp 200 wickets after Abdur Razzaq.

Skipper Mashrafe, who is on 199, is also in line for that landmark.

A series that began disappointingly for the Tigers now has turned into an opportunity for the Tigers to complete a most memorable ODI year.

Sure enough, the dominant performances against Pakistan and India will remain high on the list. However, few things can match the joy of a turnaround, because that's a scenario that the Tigers haven't painted too often.



Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (R) has a word of advice for his opening batsman Tamim Iqbal during the team's training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

An opportunity: Shakib

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

Comeback tales aren't that common in Bangladesh's cricketing folklore.

The Tigers have, in general, found life difficult whenever they have made a losing start to a series.

Never have the Tigers successfully managed to win a series against a side ranked in the top eight after losing the first match. And while they have beaten the Proteas once, they have never beaten them in a series.

However, the hosts will have a chance to change all those disillusioning stats and script a new chapter when they take on South Africa in the third and final ODI at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury

Stadium in Chittagong today.

It therefore, wasn't a surprise when ace-allrounder Shakib Al Hasan yesterday described the challenge in store as a 'big opportunity'.

"We want to win whenever we get on the field. Sometimes it goes according to plan, sometimes it doesn't. But because this is the series decider, it is more important.

"We haven't lost [a series] at home for a long time and this will be an opportunity for us. I can't tell you how big this match is, but I can surely say that this is a very big opportunity for us," said Shakib during a pre-match press conference.

"This is big no doubt. Whenever you go on to achieve something that you haven't, that will always be big. We have never beaten South Africa in a series, so

it will be a good achievement if we succeed," he added.

As the statistics go on to show, it is not very common for Bangladesh to come from behind and win a series. The only Test team that they have managed to achieve that against is Zimbabwe. As a result, it puts the hosts in a slightly unusual scenario.

Shakib though brushed aside any talks related to the building of pressure because of this situation.

"It won't be an extra pressure, nor will it motivate us. We always think about winning two matches at the start of the series and now we just have to win one more.

"Our confidence levels don't plummet or go sky high if we lose or win a match. No player thinks that way. I am

sure that if we stick to our process, then we can be successful," explained Shakib.

On a personal note, the left-hander expressed his satisfaction over the way he bowled in the last ODI. While he didn't take a wicket, he finished with miserly figures of 0 for 30 in ten overs.

"I think I bowled quite well after a long time in the last match. Personally, I was satisfied. I bowled the way I wanted to. Yes, if you get rewards [wickets] then you feel better, but I am not that disappointed regarding those things. I am happy as long as I can contribute to my team," said Shakib.

"I don't think I have changed much [bowling action]. The opposing batsmen don't charge me as much as before. So, in the one-dayers it's difficult to get wickets unless you have a

'Ready for any challenge'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



South Africa leg-spinner Imran Tahir wants his batsmen to post a total above 200 in the third and final ODI in Chittagong today. He believes that a score around that range can put either side under pressure in the final ODI, if the wicket at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium behaves similarly to the ones in Mirpur.

After the defeat in the second ODI, the leg-spinner thinks that it will be a challenge to beat the hosts in the final ODI.

"They played well in the last game. And we are looking forward to a challenge tomorrow. They played better than us in the last game and they deserved to win. I think if we had put up a better score on the board, it would have been different," said Tahir at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

"I think anything over 200 is going to be a good score. If you look at the way the pitch behaved in the last game, you could have looked for 300 as well. But it depends on how you play in the middle overs. I think 250 is going to be a good score," he added.

Despite the one-sided affair in the second match, Tahir insisted that the South Africa camp wasn't short of confidence.

"We are not worried about it at all. If they play well then they are going to win it, but we are a team that never back down from any challenge. So we are really looking forward to this.

"Everything is going well in our camp. We are very happy people. When we find ourselves in such positions, then we like to fight. We never look back. We are not worried about what happened in the last game or the game before that. We are just looking forward to tomorrow's game," said Tahir.

The leg-spinner can draw inspiration from his memories in Chittagong. South Africa played their group stage matches of the World T20 in the port city and Tahir, with 12 wickets, was the leading wicket-taker of the tournament.

While he believes that that experience will work well for him, he still opines that the third ODI will be different.

"I have played here. That's one thing that goes my way. But it was a good wicket the last time we played here. We don't know what the wicket looks like now. We are going to find out tomorrow. But we are up for any challenge."

India sweep Zimbabwe

REUTERS, Harare

A maiden century from Kedar Jadhav helped India complete a clean-sweep of the three-match one-day International series in Zimbabwe with an 83-run victory at Harare Sports Club on Tuesday.

Sent in to bat, India made a cautious start before Jadhav blazed an unbeaten 105 from 87 balls to propel the tourists to 276 for five in their 50 overs.

The home side lost wickets at regular intervals and were bowled out for 193 in the 43rd over.

India looked in trouble when they slumped to 82 for four but Jadhav, batting at number six, at first steadied the innings and then increased the scoring rate with some superb shots.

Jadhav added 144 for the fifth wicket with debutant Manish Pandey, who was last man out for 71 from 86 balls.

The teams will begin a two-match Twenty20 series on Friday at the same venue.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 276 for 5 in 50 overs (Uthappa 1, Pandey 71, Jadhav 105 not out, Binny 18 not out; Madziva 2-59, Masakadza 1-31)

ZIMBABWE: 193 all out in 42.4 overs (Chibhabha 82, Chakabva 27, Mutumbami 22; Sharma 2-33, Binny 3-55, Harbhajan 2-35, Patel 2-39)

Result: India won by 83 runs and clinched the three-match series 3-0.

Player-of-the-match: Kedar Jadhav.

Player-of-the-series: Ambati Rayudu.



Kagiso Rabada speaks to a tiny tot after his team's training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. The South Africa team spent some time with a few kids, who are battling cancer, as part of Cricket South Africa's social responsibility programme.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Luck on Tigers' side?

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



With a series victory in sight, the Tigers probably wouldn't have preferred any other ground than the one that they will be playing on today. Yes, it is true that they seem to have built their fortress at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur lately, but that should not overshadow the series of positive results that they have achieved in Chittagong.

While there is logic in the left-hander's words, no one can deny that the port city has given the cricket fans of this country several cherished memories. The West Indies, for instance, were bundled out for just 61 runs here in 2011. That was the only match of the three-match series that Bangladesh won.

"The ground in Chittagong is under pressure," joked ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan during the pre-match press conference yesterday, when asked whether he was happy that the series-decider was taking place in

'lucky' Chittagong. A practical Shakib expectedly brushed aside the notion of a lucky venue.

"We have to play well to win no matter where we play. If we want to win we will have to perform."

"Nobody says that Chittagong is lucky or the other grounds are unlucky. We have won on all our grounds and they are all lucky for us because this is our home," said Shakib.

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However, the crucial group stage victory against England during the 2011 World Cup perhaps tops the list. The half-century stand for the ninth wicket between Mahmudullah Riyad and Shaiful Islam surpassed all comebacks.

This is also the ground that saw Bangladesh almost pull off a Test upset against New Zealand in 2008. Had it not been for a defiant 76 from Daniel Vettori, Bangladesh would have achieved something that they are denied even today: a Test victory against a top-flight nation.

In October 2013, Shohag Gazi took a six-wicket haul including hattrick and then scored a century on this ground.

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