

SPORT

Old rivals face off with new agendas

NAIMUL KARIM

A comparison of the pre-series scenarios of the current Zimbabwe tour and the one last November couldn't have revealed more contradictory results.

The last time Elton Chigumbura and co arrived here, Bangladesh's national team was in tatters. They had lost 12 of their 13 ODIs prior to that series, the team management was heavily shuffled with a new coach on board and a new captain had been assigned.

There were hopes that the series would eventually turn the tables for the hosts. While it eventually did, those who were present at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium will tell you that it was no easy task.

Mushfiqur Rahim's men needed just 100 runs to win the first Test of the series, a match which was going to mark Bangladesh's first win against a full-member nation in any format that year. The hosts were reduced to 0 for 3 before the eventually scammed to a three-wicket win.

The mindset of the Tigers changed after that series and it was something that was evident in the 2015 World Cup.

As a new series begins today, the targets for the Tigers are completely different.

Having beaten top-ranked sides with ease this year, the challenge for the Zimbabwe series remains different. The popular notion is that anything less than a whitewash in the ODIs would be deemed a disappointing result. However, a defeat in the warm-up game at Fatullah suggests that this series could be far more interesting than it initially seemed.

In terms of the team line-up, the Tigers

have been forced to make a number of changes due to injuries. Soumya Sarkar, who has been Bangladesh's leading run-getter this year, had to be released from the team due to a side-strain and is likely to be replaced at the top by either Liton Das or Imrul Kayes. If Imrul gets the nod, then Liton will play at number three and that would lead to the hosts playing eight batsmen. In which case, Bangladesh will have to drop either one of their specialist spinners -- Jubair Hossain or Arafat Sunny.

It seems as though the only way either of the new pacers, Al-Amin Hossain or Kamrul Islam, will get an opportunity is if the Tigers decide to have seven batsmen in the side and drop either Sunny or Jubair.

Zimbabwe on the other hand will be missing Brendan Taylor and Hamilton Masakadza, both of whom are their highest run-getters against Bangladesh. However, as skipper Elton Chigumbura said yesterday, Zimbabwe are confident with their current line-up and have the potential to do extremely well on their day.

They have a number of spinners in their side and they will look to utilise them to the fullest. Leg-spinner Graeme Cremer would be the one to watch out for. He returned to the side for this series and removed the top three batsmen during the practice match on Thursday.

The Tigers don't usually face a lot of leg-spinners in domestic cricket and will have to keep their focus on him. Craig Ervine and Sean Williams have been Zimbabwe's most consistent batsmen this year and have averaged above 40 in 2015. They proved their potential with match-winning half-centuries on Thursday. Another player to watch out for would be Chamu Chibhaba who is



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh's Zimbabwean bowling coach Heath Streak may have imparted some wisdom to pacer Mustafizur Rahman -- whose deceptive cutters helped Bangladesh to victories over India and South Africa earlier this year -- about how he can be more lethal against the Zimbabwe batsmen.

'Not going to be that easy'

SPORTS REPORTER



The notion that this Zimbabwe series would be a mere cakewalk for the Tigers was shredded

after the visitors brushed aside a rather strong BCB XI on Thursday. Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza perhaps put it best. "This series is not going to be as easy as everybody is making it out to be," a rather serious Mashrafe told reporters during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

He described the defeat on Thursday as a 'concern' and also said that the hosts would be up against a 'balanced' Zimbabwean batting line-up.

"The very fact that we lost the match is in itself a concern for us. The way they chased down 280 showed how well they batted. There is no scope to take them lightly. As a captain it feels disappointing no matter what kind of a match you lose.

"I thought they were really balanced. They obviously will want to

do something special here since they lost against Afghanistan. I think it will be a good contest and it's one that we want to win," said the Bangladesh skipper.

While Mashrafe believed that the ODIs would be a completely different ball-game with 'much better' players in the national team, the defeat, for the first time prior to the series, seemed to bring out a more cautious approach from a Bangladesh player.

For instance, as opposed to Shakib Al Hasan's target of 'dominating the series', Mashrafe wanted to take it one match at a time.

"I believe that rather than dominating, it's important to win the match first. When you start doing well on the field, you automatically think about dominating, but when you think about dominating from the start, the pressure can get to the players.

"The first match is always very important. It's the game that settles down your nerves and after that everything becomes easier," explained

Mashrafe.

"We definitely have to play to our strengths. But I feel that at this point in time we need to work based on their weaknesses," he added.

However, above all these concerns remain Mashrafe's fitness issues. The skipper, who was recently hospitalised after being diagnosed with dengue, admitted that he wasn't 100 per cent fit, but that he was still capable of playing the first ODI today.

"I fielded for 35 overs on Thursday. It would have been good had I been able to play throughout the match but it's a little difficult to press yourself right from the first match. I had to force myself, there was no other option.

"Although I am not feeling as good as I normally do before a match, I still think that I am capable. I am not a 100 per cent fit. I would have been if I had more time to train or recover. But whenever I feel that I can play, I take that risk. I am hopeful that I can survive," said the Narail Express, who

BD A sweep Zim series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A completed a clean sweep over their Zimbabwean counterparts when they demolished the home side in the third and final one-day by 122 runs at the Harare Sports Club yesterday.

The second-string side's strong top-order batting was followed by concerted bowling to script the massive win in the third match. The visitors rode on Rony Talukdar's 82-ball 77 -- a knock that featured six fours and three sixes -- and Mohammad Mithun's 64 ball 60 to score 286 runs for eight wickets. Mithun struck three fours and a six.

The home side had no answer in chase of the challenging target and were bundled out for just 164 runs. Pacer Mohammad Shahid was the highest wicket-taker, ending with figures of three for 13.

The teams will now be involved in a two-match four-day series, with the first four-day starting from November 9.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH A: 286-8 in 50 overs (Rony 77, Tasamul 29, Mithun 60, Shuvagata 21, Mahmudul 31, Mosaddek 21, Muktar 20 not out; Garwe 3-61, Nyauchi 2-32)
ZIMBABWE A: 164 all out in 41.3 overs (Kasuzza 43, Burl 41, Mamhiyo 36 not out, Shahid 3-13, Sabbir 1-30, Shuvagata 2-18, Mahmudul 2-45, Taijul 1-29)
Result: Bangladesh A won by 122 runs to take the series 3-0.

Ajmal in hot water

DAWN.COM

Pakistan's ace right-arm off-spinner Saeed Ajmal is facing disciplinary action after criticising the International Cricket Council's (ICC) "attitude towards illegal bowling actions", ESPNcricinfo reported.

Ajmal accused the ICC of double-standards and claimed that off-spinners were being unfairly targeted in the wake of implementing regulations on bowlers with illegal bowling actions.

The 38-year-old spinner said that players from Pakistan are "more likely to be reported than those from other [countries]". Ajmal, moreover, criticised the bowling action of India's Harbhajan Singh.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) was quick in responding to Ajmal's statements and issued him a notice. It is also possible that legal action could follow from Harbhajan, who has successfully remodeled his action after being reported twice, cricinfo.com stated.

'We need to bounce back'

SPORTS REPORTER



Zimbabwe skipper Elton Chigumbura said that he hopes his side could make the most of their good start to the tour. The Zimbabweans got off to a winning start to the tour after they beat BCB XI in Fatullah on Thursday and will look to carry that momentum into the first ODI today.

"It is a good start. If we are to compare it to the last time we were here, we didn't win even the warm-up game. The most important part is about to come in the first ODI tomorrow [Saturday]. We just have to make sure to do what we did yesterday, and not change too much.

"I thought the guys played well. It was a warm-up game so we had to give everyone a chance in terms of bowling. The batters showed good composure. They played with freedom. It is something to look forward to in this series," said Chigumbura during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

A number of Zimbabwe's players have played domestic cricket in Bangladesh. Chigumbura himself will be taking part in the Bangladesh Premier League's third season later this month. In addition, their coach Dav Whatmore had a long stint with the Tigers in 2006. The skipper believed that these aspects would play to the visitors' advantage.

"He [Whatmore] has done a lot of things to us. He has been here before and coached some of the [Bangladesh]



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and his Zimbabwe counterpart Elton Chigumbura pose with the trophy for which they will be competing in the ODI series. PHOTO: STAR

guys who are playing now. He has prepared us before coming here. Other guys have played club cricket here. It is important to use that information as a team to make sure we come out on top," said the Zimbabwe captain.

The 29-year-old is also confident that the visitors can put behind their defeat at the hands of Afghanistan and move ahead.

"Afghanistan is in the past and Bangladesh are a good team at home. It will be a competitive series where both teams are hungry to win. We need to bounce back from the last series. We will come hard and we will have to play

our best cricket. We would like to be in a position to play better cricket than Bangladesh."

Furthermore, the skipper expects the black soil at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur to assist his pacers.

"I haven't seen the wicket yet. It might be assisting seamers more than spinners. Our bowlers have to realise quickly that they each have to play a big role.

"We are a different team again. The guys are good players of spin. I know the ground where we are playing assists seamers. We are not focusing on one department. Whether we face spin or seam, we have to be ready for whatever

Mitchells put Kiwis to sword

AFP, Brisbane



Australia's pace demons Mitchell Johnson and Mitchell Starc ripped apart New Zealand to put the home side on course for victory in the first Test at the Gabba on Friday.

Enforcer Johnson snared two wickets and fellow left-armed Starc claimed another two as the Black Caps succumbed late on the second day after a massive Australian declaration.

At the close, the Kiwis were digging

in at 157 for five in reply to Australia's 556 for four, trailing by 399 runs, and looking down the barrel of defeat with three days still to play.

New Zealand's big hope Kane Williamson was leading the resistance with an unbeaten 55, with wicketkeeper B.J. Watling providing support on 14.

"The Black Caps steadied after losing four wickets for 16 runs at one stage against the pace and fire of Johnson and Starc.

"It was a great spell by Mitchell Johnson to bowl fast and aggressive,"

Starcsaid.

"He's the leader of the attack, bowling fantastically, bowling with great aggression, pace and bounce. He's our enforcer.

"It's great to be in the same team and bowl in partnerships with him."

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 556 for 4 decl (Burns 71, Warner 163, Khawaja 174, Smith 48, Voges 83 not out; Boult 1-127, Neesham 1-50)

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 157 for 5 (Guptill 23, Latham 47, Williamson 55 not out; Starc 2-30, Johnson 2-52)

India seize control

AFP, Mohali



Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin battered top-ranked South Africa with a five-wicket haul to leave India in control of the bowler-dominated first Test in Mohali on Friday.

India, shot out for 201 in the first innings on a dusty, dry wicket, hit back to skittle the Proteas for 184 on the second day at the I.S. Bindra Stadium.

The hosts went to stumps on 125 for two in their second knock to take an overall lead of 142 runs with eight wickets in hand in conditions that are tailor-made for the bowlers.

Murali Vijay followed his top-score of 75 in the first innings with 47, sharing a second wicket partnership of 86 with Cheteshwar Pujara, who remained unbeaten on 63 with six fours and a six.

The pair came together after left-handed Shikhar Dhawan bagged a pair, edging Vernon Philander to the slip cordon for the second time in the match without scoring.

Vijay fell to a brilliant one-handed catch at short-leg by substitute fielder Temba Bavuma off Imran Tahir, but Indian captain Virat Kohli kept Pujara company at stumps on 11.

South Africa missed pace spearhead Dale Steyn, who did not take the field in the second innings due to a "tight right groin", according to Cricket South Africa.

The tourists' spin bowling coach Claude Henderson said Steyn was unlikely to bowl again in the Test as India attempt to build a match-winning lead on a treacherous pitch that has already seen 22 wickets fall on the first two days.

"I think he is struggling," Henderson said

of Steyn. "I can't see him bowling tomorrow."

Henderson said a target of above 200 will be tough to chase in the fourth innings.

"We need early wickets tomorrow to try and create pressure," he said. "A target beyond 200 will be challenging but I have seen this team doing some special things. Anything can happen because there is a lot of time left in the match."

Ashwin proved almost unplayable as he finished with five for 51, reaching the 150-wicket mark in his 29th Test with the dismissal of last man Imran Tahir.

All 10 South African wickets fell to Indian spinners with left-armed Ravindra Jadeja taking three for 55 and leg-break bowler Amit Mishra taking two for 35.

AB de Villiers (63) and skipper Hashim Amla (43) were the only visiting batsmen to offer resistance after Dean Elgar's 37 as the rest failed to reach double figures.

De Villiers was lucky to cross seven after television umpire Vineet Kulkarni ruled that Jadeja had bowled a no-ball when the batsman was caught in the slips by Kohli.

"I like taking five-wicket hauls," said Ashwin. "It's not a track where you spin and get five wickets. You have to work on variations and pitch it right."

"It will be a challenge batting in the fourth innings. But I think it was better to bat on today than it was yesterday. Honestly it's the batting that makes the wicket look what it is."

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings: 201
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 184 (Elgar 37, Amla 43, De Villiers 63; Ashwin 5-51, Jadeja 3-55, Mishra 2-35)

INDIA: Second innings 125 for 2 (Vijay 47, Pujara 63 not out; Philander 1-17, Tahir 1-33)



India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (2nd from R) celebrates with teammates after dismissing South Africa opener Dean Elgar on the second day of the first Test in Mohali yesterday. PHOTO: AFP