

SPORT



DOMINANCE VS RECOVERY

Singles the missing cue

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Everything is rosy when you're winning. And this is the case with the Bangladesh cricket team, which has been going through a purple patch, sealing their fifth one-day home series victory on the trot with an easy sail in the second one-day international against Zimbabwe on Monday.

The Tigers will go for a 3-0 sweep against a fast-declining Zimbabwe side today and, considering the strength of the two sides, a victory for the home team is all but guaranteed. But how well have the Tigers played so far in the series? If you go by the stats, two wins by big margins will convince you about the Tigers' extreme dominance. But sometimes stats are deceiving. The fact that Bangladesh have failed to cross the 300-run mark in their two innings, constitutes a failure against a bowling attack that lacked the necessary bite. The Tigers posted 241 in the second ODI, which could have been an easy target for any team other than a demoralised Zimbabwe.

But the point we would like to address after the first two games, especially the second one, was the inability of Bangladesh's top-order batsmen to rotate the strike, a crucial aspect for winning a one-day game.

Bangladesh scored 79 runs and lost three wickets in the first 18 overs of the second ODI. True, Zimbabwe bowled a disciplined line and length on a slow and turning track. But in those 18 overs Bangladesh's top four could stroke only 17 singles, including of course a few mishits and slog sweeps landing in the deep.

The problem of rotating strike at the top-order is nothing new for Bangladesh. We are well aware of the fact that Tamim Iqbal is a poor runner between the wickets and so is Imrul Kayes. The pair shared eight singles in the first seven overs before Tamim was dismissed.

Liton Das batted at number three and could stroke only one single during his five-over stay at the wicket. Two-down Mahmudullah garnered two singles during his almost seven-over stay at the wicket.

Zimbabwe bowled with a packed off-side field but the Bangladesh top four showed that they were not equipped enough to use those small gaps between point and extra cover or cover and mid-off to stroke those singles. Not only that, they were oblivious of the fact that a gentle push instead of a firm drive could have earned them a single.

Besides, their style of play also suggested that they are not good nudgers and pushers. Unfortunately for Bangladesh the two most nimble-footed players -- Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan -- bat down the order. One might argue that they bat at a time when the field is spread. But it's not an issue of where you are batting but the approach you bring along.

The inability to rotate strike builds pressure on a batsman and Bangladesh desperately need to solve that riddle if they are to go one step forward as a very competitive one-day unit.



While Imrul Kayes (L) made the most of his opportunity by scoring 76 runs in the second ODI against Zimbabwe, batsman Liton Das failed to perform in both games and will be hoping to redeem himself. Pacer Mustafizur Rahman (R) faces a different kind of challenge. He took three wickets in the second ODI after taking none in the first, but he will have to work hard in the third ODI today to live up to the high expectations people have of him.



PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

Full-strength Tigers seek sweep

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Having won the series, one would have generally expected the hosts to experiment a bit

with the side, especially with the presence of an uncapped pacer -- Kamrul Islam -- on the bench. However as coach Chandika Hathurusingha and captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza mentioned before and during the series, the national team would never be an arena to experiment; only the best would get opportunities.

In addition, the hosts may not want to take a risk in the supposed dead rubber since a defeat would take away two ICC rating points from them; a win on the contrary would add one.

Going by the above-mentioned factors, it is unlikely the Bangladesh eleven will witness any changes for the third and final ODI in Mirpur today. However, that doesn't mean that the team is in full stride.

As evidenced in the first two ODIs, Bangladesh's top order, especially Mahmudullah Riyad and Liton Das, have struggled. In both games, almost half the team was sent back to the pavilion around the 30-over mark and it put a lot more pressure on the middle order batsmen and the bowlers.

While Mushfiqur Rahim saved the hosts in the first game, it was Imrul Kayes' half-century that helped the hosts post a decent total in the second. The Tigers did eventually reach home quite comfortably, but on both occasions they seemed to pin their hopes on an individual

to take the team to a decent total and failed to collectively dominate the visiting bowlers.

While the likes of Tinashe Panyangara and Graeme Cremer bowled well, one expected a lot more from the top order. In fact, as a result of the top order debacle, for most parts of the game the visitors could still sniff the opportunity to win.

In the second ODI for instance, when Elton Chigumbura and Sikandar Raza were at the crease, the visitors actually had the upper hand, albeit only for a brief period. However, what this little period in the last game shows is that if given the opportunity then this Zimbabwean team could pounce on the hosts.

For that to successfully transpire though, Zimbabwe's batters need to

take lessons from Chigumbura. During the post-match press conference after the second ODI, the visiting skipper urged his top order to spend some time at the crease. "It becomes a lot easier after a few overs," he had said.

Bangladesh-Zimbabwe clashes have generally produced at least one competitive fixture every series. Even in 2014, when the hosts ran away with 5-0 and 3-0 victories in the ODIs and Tests, the Tigers really had to struggle to win the first Test at Mirpur. And it was only after that victory that the cogwheels started turning.

However, this series has been extremely one-sided so far. With one more game to go, Zimbabwean fans will hope that their side can gain some inspiration from the past and give it their all one final time in the series.

Bangladesh A concede lead

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Zimbabwe A took a 56-run lead at the end of the second day of their opening four day encounter against Bangladesh A at the Harare Sports Club yesterday. After bundling the visitors out for 268, the Zimbabweans had lost one wicket before the end of day one.

Resuming on 0 for 1, the hosts ended up finishing on a confident 324 for 6. While they did finish strongly, it initially didn't seem like the hosts would be able to post such a score as they had crumbled to 10 for 2 after 10 overs.

However, that's when Hamilton Masakadza and Peter Moore stitched a 135-run stand for the third wicket. Hamilton scored 64 while Moor posted a brilliant 104 off 202 balls. After those two batsmen were sent back, Ryan Burl held the innings together with an unbeaten 78. Spinner Tajjul Islam and pacer Abu Jayed picked up three wickets each for Bangladesh A.

Mehedi lifts under-19s

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All all-round performance from skipper Mehedi Hasan Miraz helped Bangladesh under-19s scalp a five-wicket win over their Zimbabwean counterparts at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. Barring first, the visitors were bundled out for 145 on a slow and low track, where the batters found it difficult to negotiate spinners.

Miraz bowled a tidy spell that included four maidens and finished with figures of 1 for 25. Saleh Ahmed Shawon and Ariful Islam were the other bowlers who excelled, scalping three wickets each. For the visitors, opener Jeremy Ives top-scored with 41.

The hosts were in trouble soon after the exchange as they lost three wickets with just seven runs on the board. Off-break bowler William Mashinge ran through hosts top-order and left them clueless. It was only after the arrival of Mehedi that a partnership began to ensue. The skipper shared a 101-run stand with opener Saif Hassan to take the hosts to safety.

Mehedi scored 65 while Saif posted 51. However, Mashinge got rid of both the batsmen towards the end and finished with deserving figures of 5 for 27 in six overs.

FIFA officer meets home minister

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FIFA security officer Wilhelmus van Rhee yesterday had a meeting with home minister Azaduzzaman Khan Kamal and other top officials of the government about the security arrangements for the November 17 World Cup qualifying fixture between hosts Bangladesh and Australia.

Van Rhee, who arrived in the capital yesterday morning, was briefed about the security measures taken for the match during the meeting, where home secretary Monzur Hossain, inspector general of police AKM Shahidul Haq, Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin, BFF vice president Badal Roy, BFF and AFC security officer Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hasan were present.

"The meeting discussed the preparations taken for the match. The match will take place in right time. They [FIFA] ensured us about the match as they have already given us the schedule. There is no confusion about the arrival of the Australia team and the game against Bangladesh," said Salahuddin after the meeting.

The FIFA security officer later visited the match venue, the Bangabandhu National Stadium, and the Dutchman is scheduled to visit practice venue and team hotel before holding another meeting with law enforcement agencies today.

JUNIOR (U-21) ASIA CUP Hockey team leave tonight

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Putting behind the days of impasse, the Bangladesh hockey players are now fully concentrated on producing good results in their upcoming assignments as the under-21 team leave here for Malaysia tonight to take part in 8th Junior Asia Cup, scheduled to be held from November 14 to 22.

Coach Mahbub Harun, who got only 25 training sessions to prepare his charges due to the players' boycott of national camp, is optimistic about producing good results with a side, which has nine players from the senior team.

"I didn't get enough time to prepare the team for an international tournament and that is why I will be aiming not to finish bottom in the eight-team tournament. There is not a big difference among the Asian teams at this level. If the

POOL MATCHES	
Nov 14	Bangladesh vs Pakistan
Nov 15	Bangladesh vs Oman
Nov 17	Bangladesh vs South Korea

boys can implement the game-plan properly, it is possible to beat anyone," said Harun, who was appointed the head coach for both the under-21 and the senior side after a gap of two years.

Bangladesh have been placed alongside South Korea, Pakistan and Oman in Pool B while Pool A features India, Malaysia, Japan and China.

At senior level, Bangladesh have previously beaten China and Oman in the 2013 World Hockey League while Bangladesh lost against Oman twice -- once in the 2014 Asian Games and another in the 2015

World Hockey League. However, Bangladesh under-21 team beat Oman 4-0 in the final of the qualifying round for this tournament, which itself is a qualifying platform for Junior Hockey World Cup.

"Everyone may think about [beating] Oman in group stages, but I am not thinking about Oman only, rather I will have different strategy for each of the opponents and I am focused on doing well especially in the place-deciding matches," Harun said. "I want to fine-tune the team during the three group matches and then try to achieve best-possible results in the place-deciding matches, where each team will have the opportunity to move into the semifinals."

Jamuna Bank, Fu Wang Polymer and Bangladesh Cricket Board will sponsor the under-21 team for this tournament.



Players and officials of the Bangladesh under-21 hockey team, which will leave tonight for Junior Asia Cup in Malaysia, pose for photographs at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BHF

SLC refuses to permit players

CRICINFO



Sri Lanka Cricket will refuse no-objection certificates to at least 16 centrally-contracted players seeking to take part in this year's Bangladesh Premier League, an SLC official has said. The board will instead insist that its cricketers take part in the upcoming Premier Limited Overs (List A) tournament at home. Some of the players who have been bought by BPL franchises may also be required for Sri Lanka's Test tour of New Zealand, which begins in early December. The BPL runs from November 22 to December 15.

"The centrally-contracted players will not be given permission, because there is a tour of New Zealand for which the players leave on November 27," SLC cricket operations manager Carlton Bernardus said. "The board has also taken a decision that all the centrally-contracted players who won't be on that tour should stay back and play in the domestic tournament, which begins on November 20th."

The move is aimed to protect the quality of the Premier Limited Overs tournament, and to help ensure Sri Lanka's clubs have their best players available to them throughout the season.

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury however said that they are confident the SLC will give the NOCs.

"We are confident that SLC will give the NOCs in the next few days," he told ESPNcricinfo on Monday evening.

The BPL has requested no-objection certificates for 25 Sri Lankan players, but out of those, 17 -- including the likes of Lahiru Thirimanne and Sachithra Senanayake -- have central contracts.

"Where there are no contracts, players can get permission from their clubs," Bernardus said. "For example, Dilshan Munaweera is not a contracted player, and the Bloomfield CC president has given him permission - that is fine."

SLC has focused on raising the quality of its domestic cricket this year, and has increased match fees for domestic games in an attempt to make cricket a more stable source of income for players. With a zonal tournament also in the works for the upcoming season, domestic cricketers' earning potential has been significantly improved.

"The board has invested in the players," Bernardus said. "They have enhanced the fees to 7000 rupees per match day. If our domestic cricket is not played properly, where are we going?"