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Need to focus on low-risk shots: Mushy

SPORTS REPORTER

Amidst all the fanfare surrounding the ICC Under-19 World Cup, the Bangladesh national players quietly returned to the capital yesterday following the end of their training camp in Khulna.

They spent almost a month in the peaceful south-western city trying to hone their T20 skills. The one aspect that the team management had a special focus on in the last one month was their batting. It was quite evident from the four-match T20I series against Zimbabwe that Bangladesh's batting approach has plenty of room for improvement.

While speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, senior batsmen Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal spoke about the ways the team worked on their batting.

"T20 cricket is a kind of game where you always have to play with a lot of risk. So in order to counter that, we have been working on perfecting our low-risk shots in the last two weeks. We need to strengthen those shots and get as many runs as possible," said Mushfiqur, who said he has recovered sufficiently from his hamstring injury sustained during the Zimbabwe series.

"It's not just about power-hitting. You need plenty of skill in T20 cricket as well. A middle-order batsman does not get much time either and it's difficult. So yeah, we have to make most of our runs through non-risky hits," he added.

Tamim echoed Mushfiqur's sentiments. "There is definitely a formula or an approach that one needs to follow while batting in T20 cricket and in the last one month or so we have been working on trying to figure that out. At the moment, following the training sessions, I think as a team we are in a much better position than what we were a year ago," said Tamim.

The left-hander admitted that he did not have the best of times during the Zimbabwe series. He was however happy with his batting approach. In the first two games against Zimbabwe Tamim was seen trying to get set by tucking a few balls away for singles rather than attempting to punch in those drives from the beginning.

The left-hander said that he feels a lot more comfortable batting in this format at the moment.

"I don't think batting in this format is difficult. It's just that we have not been able to do well here. If you see, I had scored 20s and 30s but never really scored big, which I should have. In T20 cricket, it's those one or two batsmen, after getting set, who take the team through.

"At the moment, I am happy with the process of my batting. I have been trying to acquire this process for a long time and now that I have I'll definitely try to make the most of it."

Both Mushfiqur and Tamim will leave for Dubai to take part in the Pakistan Super League as soon as they receive their visas, which may be either today or tomorrow. Both of them expect the competition to provide them with good practice ahead of the Asia Cup and the ICC World



The junior Tigers will need to overcome their Namibian counterparts in their final Group A match of the ICC U-19 World Cup in Cox's Bazar today if they are to broaden their smiles.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Watson topples Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has been knocked off the perch in the MRF Tyres ICC T20 all-rounder ranking by Australia's Shane Watson, according to the latest ranking published by the game's governing body yesterday.

Watson surged to the top, with 363 points, as Shakib (349) dropped to second and Shahid Afridi (330) of Pakistan dropped to third.

Shakib scored 54 runs at an average of 27 and took five wickets in the four matches against Zimbabwe in the home series last month while Watson scored 151 runs and took three wickets in the recent three-match series against India.

Shakib, however, holds the top spot in ODI all-rounder rankings while he is second behind Ravichandran Ashwin of India in the Test all-rounder ranking.

Bangladesh were in 11th position in the team's rankings, four points behind Scotland, following the 2-2 series draw against Zimbabwe.

Meanwhile, India, who are also the number one in Tests, overtook the West Indies to reach the top spot in the shortest format. India have 120 rating points, two more than the Caribbean unit. Sri Lanka also have 118 rating points like the West Indies but they are third in the charts.

India have hit top form in the T20 format ahead of the World T20 to be held at home in March-April. They had famously won the inaugural World T20 in South Africa in 2007.

England (117 rating points) are fourth in the rankings ahead of New Zealand (116), South Africa (115), Pakistan (113) and Australia (110). Afghanistan (80) and Scotland (66) round up the top-10.

Pant powers India to the top

Consolation victories for New Zealand, Afghanistan

STAR SPORT DESK



Rishabh Pant smacked a 24-ball 78 to lead India to a thumping victory over Nepal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Pant, who bludgeoned Nepal's bowlers with five sixes and nine fours in his blistering knock, helped India race past their target of 169 in just 18.1 overs in a match reduced to a 48-overs-a-side affair after a half-hour delay caused by early morning fog. His half-century came off just 18 balls -- the fastest in Under-19 ODIs.

India's emphatic victory was set up by fast bowler Avesh Kumar, who claimed three wickets for 34 runs. Mayank Dagar and Washington

SCORES IN BRIEF

CANADA: 147 all out (Arslan 38; Musa 3-31)	Kishan 52
AFGHANISTAN: 149 for 6 in 24.1 overs (Stanikzai 56; Patel 3-17)	Result: India won by 7 wickets.
Result: Afghanistan won by 4 wickets.	IRELAND: 212 all out in 47.5 overs (Tector 56; Ravindra 3-36, Finnie 3-20)
NEPAL: 169 for 8 in 48 overs (Sunar 37; Avesh Khan 3-34)	NEW ZEALAND: 213 for 6 in 40.1 overs (Allen 97, Phillips 58; Anders 4-32)
INDIA: 175 for 3 in 18.1 overs (Pant 78, Sundar supported him well with two wickets each.	Result: New Zealand won by 4 wickets

and Namibia in the quarterfinal in Mirpur on February 5.

Pant said he was disappointed to miss out on a century, admitting that he became nervous as he approached the mark.

"I am obviously not happy that I could not get a 100... mainly because I got a little nervous thinking that I may set a new record," he said. "It was a good pitch for batting and I was able

to go through my shots."

New Zealand, smarting from two losses against India and Nepal, took third place in Group D after a four-wicket win against Ireland in Fatullah. Rachin Ravindra and skipper Josh Finnie picked up three wickets each as New Zealand bowled out Ireland for 212 and then won in the 41st over after Finn Allen scored 97 and Dale Phillips made 58.

Afghanistan finished third in Group B with a four-wicket win over Canada in Sylhet. Muslim Musa and Shamsurrahman Wali took three wickets each as Afghanistan bowled Canada out for 147 and then rode on Tariq Stanikzai's 56 to surpass the target in the 25th over. Afghanistan captain Ihsanullah Janat said his team gained valuable experience playing against teams like Pakistan and Sri Lanka.



At the pinnacle of his form Novak Djokovic, who has described his record-equalling sixth Australian Open title at the expense of Andy Murray on Sunday as a great wind behind his back for the rest of the season, enjoys his time with a tiny tot at the Koori centre in Melbourne yesterday. The Novak Djokovic Foundation has donated \$20,000 to the Melbourne City Mission early childhood programme.

PHOTO: SMH

Finch doubtful for World T20

SMH

Australia's troubled build-up to the World T20 has hit another major stumbling block with captain Aaron Finch no certainty to lead the team to the tournament.

Already ruled out of the Chappell-Hadlee series, Finch is now in a race against the clock to make it to India after scans confirmed he has sustained a "moderate grade" tear to his hamstring.

Cricket Australia is aiming to have Finch ready for the event but are unsure when he will be fit to return. Hamstring injuries commonly take 21 days to recover from though that is for low-end strains.

Australia's first match, against New Zealand, is not until March 18 - almost seven weeks away. It is also unclear if Finch will make it back in time for the three-game series in South Africa preceding the World T20, which begins on March 4.

Kohli rested for SL T20s

CRICINFO, New Delhi

Batsman Virat Kohli has been rested for the three T20 internationals against Sri Lanka in February ahead of the Asia Cup later in the month. Delhi left-arm spinner Pawan Negi, who used to play for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL, received his first call up to the India side.

Swing bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar has also been named in the squad along with middle-order batsman Manish Pandey.

A different lesson

ABRAR HOSSAIN

The ICC Under-19 World Cup brings together the world's elite youth cricketers and watching them on television it is easy to forget how young they are and that they are on an educational quest -- not just about cricket but about life in general. One such opportunity presented itself for the Sri Lankan youths in Dhaka, in the form of a brief appearance to meet a group of differently-abled students from the Parents Forum for Differently Able (PFDA) Vocational Training Centre at hotel Le Meridien yesterday.

The event was organised by International Labour Organisation (ILO), which was represented by senior communications officer Steve Needham, in order to persuade similar organisations to band together in an effort to raise awareness and eventually decrease the number of differently-abled children who are unable to find work.

They were in relaxed mood away from the serious business of their World Cup campaign, no doubt buoyed by the two wins that took them through to the quarterfinals. The entire squad were enthralled from start to finish by the lives of these children. There were no communication problems as the children of

the foundation were fluent in English, as well as being gifted in their own separate ways.

The programme began at 10 am and lasted over an hour; media presence was relatively light and that was perhaps why the Lankan youngsters were able to open up so much despite sporadic and mostly futile calls from their management to curb their enthusiasm. During the seminar, the head of the PFDA Sajida Rahman Danny told the stories of each and every child, which the U-19 squad listened to eagerly, they also enjoyed a musical performance from two members of the group. Near the end the team took it upon themselves to have a chat with the children, followed by a brief photo shoot which was sprinkled with the inevitable selfies between the players and the children.

When captain Charith Asalanka was asked how the team were feeling before tomorrow's big game against fellow last-eight qualifiers Pakistan, he replied, "Well, it's a vital game, but it's just a game, that's how my friends and I see it. So we will take it as such."

One wonders if such a philosophical view existed before their visit or whether it came about because of the different perspective that the cricketers were exposed to. Either way, the event left the impression that both groups of

SOUTH ASIAN GAMES 2016

Tough times for shooting

SPORTS REPORTER

Shooting is a discipline which has produced one-third of the gold medals for Bangladesh in the South Asian (SA) Games -- 22 out of 62 gold medals came from this discipline. The shooters were not disappointed the nation since the inclusion of the event in 1991, except for the 2006 Colombo edition.

Having shrugged off the poor performance in Colombo, Bangladeshi shooters returned in style with three gold medals in the following Dhaka SA Games in 2010, but as the 12th edition is around the corner, there is little hope of a repeat of the feat.

The current national shooting squad is considered 'a weak and young one' due to the absence of international gold medalists such as shooter-turned-coach Asif Hossain Khan, suspended Sharmin Akter Ratna, absent Sadia Sultana and retired Sabrina Sultana.

The shooters, especially the ones who participate in the 10m air rifle event, are currently being guided by Korean coach Lee Jong-Hyun. They have participated in international tournaments round the year but their last week's participation in the Asian Olympic shooting qualifiers in India did not give any positive hope about winning gold medals from 11 shooting events in the 12th SA Games.

Though Bangladeshi shooters will be competing in 10m air rifle, 50m rifle three position, 50m rifle prone, 25m and 50m pistol and other events, the focus is on men's 10m air rifle event where Commonwealth Games silver winner Abdullah Hel Baki, Shovon Chowdhury and Risalatul Islam are likely to compete against India's world-class shooters -- Olympics bronze winner Gagan Narang, Commonwealth Games gold winner Imran Hasan Khan and Asian Games bronze winner Chain Singh.

"Baki is the lone hope of Bangladesh for a gold medal because his scores are

at world level. We are hopeful that two shooters will play in the final round, which is a totally different phase, and if Baki can keep his cool, he can come successful," said five-time SA Games gold medallist and now a coach, Saiful Islam Rinky, who is also optimistic about Bangladesh winning silver medals in all team events.

Neither Baki nor any of Shovon Chowdhury and Anjan Singh could qualify for the final round of the 10m air rifle event in the 13th Asian Olympic shooting qualifiers having scored 619, 615.5 and 608.5 points respectively. India's Akhil Shoran qualified for the finals with a score of 620.1 points but he found no place in the SA Games squad due to the inclusion of Gagan, Imran and Chain.

The performance of women in 10m air rifle event was also disappointing, with Tripti Dutta, Zakia Sultana, Sharmin Akter Jr. finishing 34th, 40th and 44th respectively while India's Ayonika Paul and Pooja Ghatkar, who will compete in the SA Games too,



The Sri Lanka U-19 squad paid a visit to the children of the Parents Forum for Differently Able Vocational Training Centre at hotel Le Meridien yesterday. The wide smiles on everyone's faces reflect the enthusiasm both parties shared at the seminar.

PHOTO: STAR