



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

The Tigers have to pull together in the same direction if they are to rise above mediocrity in T20 cricket when they compete in the Asia Cup later this month and the World Twenty20 in March, and they were training hard to accomplish that at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

Tigers are a force to reckon with: Dravid

SPORTS REPORTER



Former India national captain and current India Under-19 coach Rahul Dravid has said that he was impressed with the way Bangladesh's national team progressed in the last couple of years.

Speaking to reporters ahead of the first semifinal of the ICC Under-19 World Cup, to be played between Sri Lanka and India, Dravid said that Bangladesh's next target would be to do well outside their home turf.

"Bangladesh has had a terrific last couple of years, especially playing at home and in the shorter format of the game. They are a force to reckon with. In the last couple of years they have been absolutely exceptional."

"It has coincided with the fact that Shakib [Al Hasan], Mushfiqur [Rahim] and [Mashrafe Bin] Mortaza who now are a lot more senior. They are really stars in the international stage as well," said Dravid.

Many believe that 2015 was Bangladesh's most successful cricketing year. They beat teams like Pakistan, India and South Africa at home and also made it through to the quarterfinals of the World Cup.

The other major aspect was the addition of Mustafizur Rahman to the squad. The left-arm pacer has been creating waves around the world ever since his debut.

While Dravid is yet to see enough of Mustafizur, he believes that there are plenty of talented players in the pipeline for Bangladesh.

"I have not seen enough to comment but people tell me nice things about Mustafizur. I saw one or two boys in the Bangladesh A team in India. Some nice talents like Mahmudullah [Riyad] who has done well."

"The results tell me that the graph is going upwards, especially at home. I think their next challenge is to replicate these performances overseas for Bangladesh cricket," he said.

Dravid's India will take on Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today in the first semifinal.



Reds rethink ticket prices

AFP, London

Liverpool's owners will consider a review of controversial ticket price hikes after being shocked by a walkout protest by 10,000 fans, media said yesterday.

The Fenway Sports Group held emergency talks after Saturday's protest and again Sunday, British newspapers reported. Fans have meanwhile threatened more walkouts in looming key games against Chelsea and Manchester City.

Saturday's walkout was staged in the 77th minute of the 2-2 home draw against Sunderland in protest at the £77 (\$112) top price for a seat in the new main stand at Anfield.

Fans chanted "enough is enough" as thousands stood up and walked up in a gesture that shocked the FSG owners.

The board's talks are set to continue this week. But a review is possible even though the English club's management insist that about two thirds of main stand ticket prices will remain stable or fall.

Liverpool have felt the brunt of growing discontent among English fans at the steady increase in ticket prices while Premier League revenues have shot up, notably after making a £5.14 billion television rights deal for 2016-2019, up 70% on the previous deal.

Jay McKenna, spokesman for the Spirit of Shankly supporters group, said Saturday's protest was "a good indication that supporters are very angry at prices and this will just be the start of taking more action."

Windies spoil Asian party

Beat Pakistan to face Bangladesh in semis

SPORTS REPORTER



Against the odds, the West Indians put in a brilliant all-round performance to knock Pakistan out of the ICC Under-19 World Cup as they beat them by five wickets in the fourth quarterfinal at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium yesterday.

Choosing to bat first, Pakistan recovered from 57 for 5 to post 227 at the end of 50 overs courtesy of a century from Umair Masood. In reply, the West Indians reached home with 10 overs to spare. The Pakistani players tried their best to stifle the boys from the Caribbean with spin, but the play did not work.

The West Indies were the first team to arrive in Bangladesh prior to the World Cup. Back then their

skipper Shimron Hetmyer admitted that the team could have been better prepared for the tournament. They had played a three-match series against Bangladesh and were convincingly beaten in every match mainly because of their inability to play spin.

However, after yesterday's game, it seems as though they have adjusted well to the conditions and now seem a lot more comfortable. The one-sided victory could prove to be a warning for hosts Bangladesh, a side they will face in the semifinal on February 11.

Speaking to the media prior to the quarterfinal yesterday, a Bangladeshi player admitted that the side would much rather face the West Indies than Pakistan, considering that the hosts had beaten the boys from the Caribbean prior to the World Cup.

However, yesterday's magnificent display suggests that Bangladesh would have to be on their toes to reach the final.

During the chase, Hetmyer scored 52 and Tevin Imlach made 54 to ensure a gallant 113 by Umair Masood went in vain. Pakistan's defeat prevented an all-Asian semifinal, but the West Indies played better all-round cricket to emerge as deserved winners.

Umair came to the crease in the 15th over with Pakistan struggling at 40 for four and rebuilt the innings in the company of Salman Fayyaz after half the side was back in the hut by the 21st over.

During the chase West Indies raced to 100 for one by the 16th over. Hetmyer and Imlach put on 77 for the second wicket to take the score to 122 for one, before two needless run outs saw them slip to

147 for four.

Shamar Springer was the fifth batsman to fall for 37 when 38 runs were still needed for victory, but Jyd Goolie (26 not out) and Keemo Paul (24 not out) saw their side home.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe upset the tournament's defending champions South Africa by eight wickets to enter the Plate Championship final for teams that finished outside the top eight.

In the 13th place play-off semifinal, Scotland defeated Fiji by 76 runs in Cox's Bazar.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 227 for 6 (Masood 113, Fayyaz 58 not out; Holder 2-26)

WEST INDIES: 229 for 5 in 40 overs (Imlach 54, Hetmyer 52, Springer 37)

Result: West Indies won by five wickets.

Leicester fan eyeing fairytale end

REUTERS, London

Leicester City fan Leigh Herbert will pocket a cool 25,000 pounds if his team complete their fairytale run and win the Premier League title.

Herbert placed a five-pound bet on Claudio Ranieri's men to lift the trophy at the start of the season at odds of 5000/1.

The Foxes are five points clear at the top with 13 games left following Saturday's 3-1 win at Manchester City and the 39-year-old carpenter feels he is on the verge of a "life-changing" win.

"I am going to hang in there, I believe in fairytale," he said.

The bookmaker will have to pay out more than 2 million pounds if Leicester win the title, with the biggest potential windfall of 140,775 pounds going to a customer from Guildford.

Indian firepower meets Lankan guile

SPORTS REPORTER



Will Sri Lanka be able to stop India's brilliant run in the ICC Under-19 World Cup? The two sub-continental teams face off in the first semifinal of the tournament today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur with India as favourites.

India's batting proved to be a dangerous weapon in the tournament with aggressive hitting from left-handed opener Rishabh Pant and calculated batting from Sarfaraz Khan in the middle order. Sri Lanka's strength is their spin attack but the question was whether they will be able to challenge the strong Indian batting. India Under-19 skipper Ishan Kishan however said yesterday during a pre-match press conference that they do not have any special plans against the Sri Lankan spin attack. "No special plans. We played lots of domestic matches before coming here. We played good spinners there and don't want to change our batting against their spinners. We will try to stick to our basics and rotate the strike," said Ishan Kishan. Sri Lanka coach Roger Wijesuriya also said that they will go with their strength against India, who are generally good against spin bowling.

"India are a strong side, a good all-round side. We know their strengths. I know Indians play spin well but spin bowling is our strength and we will stick to that," said Wijesuriya adding that his side's impressive win over England left him optimistic about the semifinal.

Former India skipper Rahul Dravid, who is touring with the team as a coach, had a guarded approach when asked about his side's chances in the semifinal despite the fact that his team has had a good run in the tournament and won a tri-series in Sri Lanka last December.

"We know what to expect from them [Sri Lanka]. They have a couple of seamers and a lot of good spinners. They bowl a lot of spin. Having said that, they also know what to expect from us. It should be a good contest. We have been playing very good cricket of late and the lead-up to the tournament was good," said Dravid.

Three-time champions India romped to the semifinal with an all-win record against New Zealand, Nepal and Ireland in Group D, before crushing Namibia by 197 runs in the quarterfinal while Sri Lanka bounced back after a 23-run defeat to Pakistan in their last Group B match to stun a strong England side by six wickets in the quarterfinal to book their

Man City play a game of pong

AGENCIES, Manchester

Manchester City continue Chinese New Year celebrations by arming Sergio Aguero, Fabian Delph, Kevin De Bruyne and Joe Hart with chopsticks in front of a bowl of ping pong balls.

You can see where this is going. Hart, City and England's No.1, is perhaps a surprising struggler, while Kevin De Bruyne's ball control skills must be rusty after his recent injury set back.

To be honest, none of the intrepid foursome covered themselves in glory - Hart even resorts to borderline cheating at times - in the end however, it was Fabian Delph that emerged victorious was given the esteemed chopstick challenge award.

Zizou urges Modric to shoot more

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane encouraged Croatian playmaker Luka Modric to shoot more often as his first league goal of the season salvaged a 2-1 win at Granada on Sunday.

Youssef El Arabi had deservedly cancelled out Karim Benzema's first-half opener for Real before Modric's fantastic strike into the top corner five minutes from time kept Real just four points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona.

"Modric scored a great goal that has given us life and, above all, three points," said Zidane.

"I am happy for him because he has to shoot more. He knows how to play in many positions, including as a number 10. Today he showed he has a fantastic strike and I am happy with him."

However, Madrid captain Sergio Ramos insisted the former Tottenham Hotspur midfielder deserves more praise even when he doesn't find the net.

"This goal maybe makes him a bit more visible, but, the way I see football, Modric is indispensable," said Ramos.

"He is the spine of the team and very important player for us."

Victory was Real's fourth in five games since Zidane took charge last month.

However, in contrast to their emphatic form at home of late, Real once again struggled on the road and were thankful to Granada's profligacy in front of goal.

"You also need to think that when we play away, we are playing against a team that has their fans behind them. It is normal that it is more difficult," added Zidane.

"I was most struck by the attitude of the players. There will be no easy games, those don't exist in football."

"You have to fight until the end and I'm happy that is what we did."