



Pacer Lasith Malinga led his troops from the front as he tore through the UAE batting line-up with a four-wicket haul, including two wickets in his first over, as Sri Lanka launched their Asia Cup title defence with a 14-run win at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigers weakened by the strong hand

SAKEB SUBHAN



India on Wednesday. Faced with a challenging total on a greenish pitch, Bangladesh's top order could neither handle the moving ball nor did they have the wherewithal to get their eyes in and cash in later when the Indian spinners would have come on and have had to contend with the batting and the dew on the ground.

The odd loss in the game's shortest format cannot be seen as shattering; the brief nature of the game and the role luck plays make it difficult to maintain the sort of consistency the Tigers have shown in 50-over cricket in 2015. But this was not the odd loss; it was a continuation of a terrible T20 record. Also technical shortcomings may not be rectified overnight or even over the course of three training camps. But when there are tactical shortcomings like those displayed on Wednesday, it is a cause for frustration and may point to a deeper malaise in how Bangladesh approach their least favoured format.

Bangladesh's most technically adept and arguably best batsman is Mushfiqur Rahim, but he came in to bat in the 13th over at number six. Meanwhile, a struggling Sarkar, an

unproven Imrul Kayes was entrusted with the top three positions. All three were back in the hut with the score on 50 and half the overs consumed.

Mushfiqur is adept at picking the singles and then later opening his shoulders, which he can do as well as anyone in the country, therefore a higher position in the order seems a no-brainer. And if Mahmudullah Riyad, who is not as adept at rotating the strike early on but can be deadly with his eye in as he showed in the World Cup down under, is to be persisted with he is completely wasted at number seven, where he batted on Wednesday.

After the match skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said the reason for Mushfiqur's low placement was the strategy of maintaining a right-hand, left-hand batting combination. If the right-handed Sabbir Rahman had gotten out Mushfiqur would have come in, and if southpaw Soumya did not get out first Imrul would not have. This was because, in Mashrafe's words, "their main bowler was [Ravichandran] Ashwin."

What Ashwin, an off-spinner who can also bowl the ball that leaves the right-hander, has to do with it is anyone's guess, but this obsession with the left-right combination is a familiar one in Bangladesh cricket, and it increasingly seems that it is unique to the Tigers.

Assuming that they want to climb up the T20 rankings, a look at the top

teams reveal the flaw in this obsession. Top-ranked India have a static combination of the left-handed Shikhar Dhawan followed by the right-handed Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in the top three. Second-ranked South Africa's top three positions in the batting order are occupied by right-handers Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers and Faf du Plessis. The point is not that Bangladesh do not have a de Villiers or a Kohli, but that the players like Mushfiqur they do have are not being utilised in the short space that a T20 innings provides.

In the dark days of 2014, Bangladesh lost an ODI against Sri Lanka after having them eight down for 67 chiefly because then skipper Mushfiqur thought, without considering the quality of the bowler, that the off-spin of Riyad would be a better option than the likes of Shakib Al Hasan and Arafat Sunny -- who had caused most of the damage -- against the left-handed Thisara Perera. The current obsession with something coincidental like a batsman's stronger hand over the strategic importance of which batsman is likely to be more successful harkens back to those dark days.

On the bowling side of things, Mashrafe has proven a very proactive captain, always putting the best foot forward with a view to winning the game, regardless of what arm the bowler bowls with. Perhaps it is time he replicates that in his approach to T20 batting.

IMPACT MAN



DINESH'S CRUCIAL ACT

On a two-paced wicket, Dinesh Chandimal saved his team from humiliation by striking a polished 39-ball 50. He hit seven fours and a six and shared in an opening stand of 68 in just 9.1 overs with Tillakaratne Dilshan. Mixing caution with attack Chandimal carried his team to 89 in the 14th over when he got out. The importance of his innings was underlined by the fact that Sri Lanka could add only 40 runs for the loss of five wickets after his departure. He also hit the only six for his side, a powerful pull over midwicket off Qadeer Ahmed.

Lankans tough it out

SPORTS REPORTER



Sri Lanka received a scare after a sub-par batting performance, but rode on Dinesh Chandimal's half-century and a four-wicket haul by skipper Lasith Malinga to beat the UAE by 14 runs in their first match of the Asia Cup T20 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium last night.

Sri Lanka managed only 129 for eight after being sent in to bat by UAE skipper Amjad Javed, who caused the major damage with three for 25 from four tidy overs.

Having lost a host of early wickets to find themselves at 47 for six at the halfway stage of the chase, UAE made a good fight of it mainly through a 36-ball 37 from Swapnil Patil. At one stage in the 15th over when he hit Dushmantha Chameera for consecutive boundaries an upset seemed possible, but Malinga snuffed out that hope by catching Patil off his own bowling. Nuwan Kulasekara then dismissed Javed and Malinga had Mohammad Naveed caught at cover to claim his fourth wicket. UAE attained some respectabil-

ity by crossing the 100-run mark and ended on 115 for nine.

UAE faltered from the very first ball of the chase when Malinga bowled his customary slinging full delivery to trap Rohan Mustafa in front. In the third over he returned with another of his specials, the slower yorker, to hit Mohammad Shahzad's timbers. The two-paced pitch came into play when Nuwan Kulasekara induced a miscue from Mohammad Kaleem in the next

Earlier, three quick wickets from pacer Javed took all the wind out of a promising start from the Lankans. Tillakaratne Dilshan and Chandimal put on 68 for the first wicket in just 9.1 overs with Chandimal particularly in good form. The stand was broken when an out-of-sorts Dilshan pulled Javed into the hands of deep midwicket in the 12th over. In his next over Javed bounced out Milinda Siriwardena and made it three in three overs when Chandimal, having just completed his 50 in 38 balls, slogged one straight to deep midwicket.

The rot had set in and the innings could not recover with none of the remaining batsmen finding their range. Naveed returned to have Dasun Shanaka caught at mid-off in the 16th over, before picking up Jayasuriya in his next over. In between Mustafa trapped Angelo

Mathews in front to snuff out Sri Lanka's last hope of a late charge. Starting the last over on 123 for six, Sri Lanka lost two wickets -- Kapugedera caught at deep midwicket and Kulasekara's top-edge caught by the keeper -- to Shahzad to end the innings on a disappointing 129 for eight.



over. A bad situation for UAE became worse when Mohammad Usman edged a slog to slip in the same over to leave UAE at four for 16. A 22-run partnership between Shaiman Anwar and Patil was broken by Sri Lanka's other weapon, left-arm spinner Rangana Herath, who had Anwar and Saqlain Haider caught by keeper Chandimal in consecutive overs.

Indo-Pak game excites Malik

SPORTS REPORTER



On Thursday, for the first time since the start of the Asia Cup a week ago, the tournament seemed complete. The Pakistan team finally arrived on Wednesday and the team hotel was

abuzz with players from the five different nations chatting with each other.

The most frequently seen players in the corridors understandably were from Pakistan. Having just arrived many of them were still trying to figure out which way each of the long passages led to.

It was during one of those explorations that the media came across Pakistan's Shoaib Malik. Dressed in casuals, Malik spoke on one of the most-talked about cricket rivalries in the world: India versus Pakistan.

The two teams will face off tomorrow in what is expected to be a packed Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

"It's a kind of match that people from both countries look forward to. There's a lot of excitement and every cricketer from either side wants to give his best. Both the sides know the amount of satisfaction that the winning team gets from this match," said Malik.

In the first game, Bangladesh caused India early trouble with four pacers. Malik did not want to reveal their bowling plans, but was confident and believed that his side was in good spirits following the Pakistan Super League.

"If you look at India's performance, you will see that they are playing quite well. A number of our players took part in the PSL and we had a good time there. All together, I think we are set for another exciting encounter," said Malik.

SL-UAE SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA	R/B	A/F		
Chandimal c Shahzad b Javed	50/39	7/1		
Dilshan c Usman b Javed	27/28	4/0		
Siriwardena c Haider b Javed	6/7	0/0		
Shanaka c Anwar b Naveed	5/11	0/0		
Mathews lbw b Mustafa	8/9	0/0		
Jayasuriya b Naveed	10/7	2/0		
Kapugedera c Raza b Shahzad	10/11	0/0		
Kulasekara c Patil b Shahzad	7/7	1/0		
Chameera not out	1/1	0/0		
Extras: (lb-1, w-4)		5		
Total: (For 8 wks in 20 overs)		129		
Fall of wickets: 1-68, 2-79, 3-89, 4-98, 5-105, 6-113, 7-123, 8-129.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Naveed	4	0	27	2
Qadeer	2	0	18	0
Javed	4	0	25	3
Shahzad	3	0	27	2
Raza	4	0	14	0
Mustafa	3	0	17	1
UAE	R/B	A/F		
Mustafa lbw b Malinga	0/1	0/0		
Kaleem c Mathews b Kulasekara	7/11	0/0		
Shahzad b Malinga	1/2	0/0		
Usman c Kapugedera b Kulasekara	6/9	1/0		
Anwar c Chandimal b Herath	13/15	2/0		
Patil c & b Malinga	37/36	3/2		
Haider c Chandimal b Herath	1/9	0/0		
Javed c Kapugedera b Kulasekara	13/18	0/0		
Naveed c Mathews b Malinga	10/10	1/0		
Raza not out	9/8	0/0		
Qadeer not out	2/4	0/0		
Extras: (lb-1, lb-2, w-6, nb-7)		16		
Total: (For 9 wks in 20 overs)		115		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-7, 3-14, 4-16, 5-38, 6-47, 7-85, 8-93, 9-99.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Malinga	4	0	26	4
Kulasekara	4	1	10	3
Mathews	3.4	0	24	0
Herath	4	0	22	2
Chameera	3.2	0	22	0
Siriwardena	1	0	8	0
Result: Sri Lanka won by 14 runs.				
Player-of-the-match: Lasith Malinga.				

Shakib's unusual slump

NAIMUL KARIM



One does not generally fret over Shakib Al Hasan's performance. The all-rounder's consistency over the years has been quite brilliant. It is almost a given that the left-hander will contribute for his side one way or the other.

When he fails with the bat, he ensures that he bowls a tidy spell. When he gets whacked, he often tends to make up with an ice-cool knock that generally takes Bangladesh home. And even if neither of them works out, he makes his presence felt on the field.

Let's not forget the two crucial wickets that he was involved in during Bangladesh's World Cup encounter against England. He took a well-judged running catch at the boundary and then inflicted a run-out. These were two world-class acts in a single game.

So Shakib's performance in a game is generally not a cause for concern. As skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza put it after the India game: "Shakib is our best player. Let's not forget that."

However, despite his enormous reputation, his recent performances may worry even the most ardent of his supporters. Statistically, he has seen a fall in his numbers both in

batting and bowling which is uncharacteristic of a player of his calibre. For instance, in his last 10 T20s, all of which he played this year, he has averaged just 14.7 with the bat. That is a number that could have been lower had he not hit that lone half-century in the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

He has played five T20 internationals in 2016 so far and his economy rate is already above eight, his highest number in a calendar year so far. He has not yet ended a year with an economy rate above 8 in his career. In addition, he recently recorded his most expensive bowling figures, none for 45 against Zimbabwe in January. Soon after that, he put in a similar performance in the PSL where he leaked 43 runs in a match against the Quetta Gladiators.

Amid all this, the last thing that Shakib needed was the misfortune he received during the game against India. He was on the receiving end of a rocket-like hit from Rohit Sharma at point -- a position he generally does not field in. There were a couple of catches that he almost got hold of at the edge of the boundary and then was run-out for three after the exchange. It was no doubt a tough night.

There's plenty of talent in this Bangladeshi team. But if Bangladesh really want to excel in the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20, they will need the services of their most experienced T20 player and desperately hope that the left-hander emerges from this rare slump.



INFO ZONE

BANGLADESH V UAE

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	M	W	L
1	1	0	1	0	1

IN ALL T20IS

THE TEAMS HAVE NEVER MET IN T20IS BEFORE

KEY PLAYERS

SABBIR RAHMAN	MOHAMMAD USMAN	
14	Inns	7
329	Runs	182
29.54	Ave	36.4
119.04	SR	115.18
51*	HS	49*
2	50s	0
30	4s	21
8	6s	5