



Mahmudullah Riyad, the man who was at the wrong end of a heartbreaking loss against the same opposition in the same competition at the same ground in 2012, set off for an unbridled celebration after hitting the winning runs in their crucial Asia Cup T20 match against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Riyad's poetic justice

SAKEB SUBHAN



The similarities were uncanny, the possibilities either too cruel or poetically just. The actor and his nemesis were the same, as were the stage and situation, give or take a wicket here and a run there. At stake was the chance to rectify a tragedy that took place three weeks short of four years ago. Then the denouement was one of tears that washed a team and a nation. Yesterday it was of sliding, playful celebration, players climbing on top of the hero of the moment and a capacity crowd deafeningly revelling in the healing of a nation's collective sporting wound. At the centre of it all, in both highly contrasting endings, was perhaps the most understated cricketing hero of them all: Mahmudullah Riyad.

He did not wait for the ball to cross the rope. When he hit the first ball of the last over towards the midwicket boundary, a celebration four years in the making could not wait another second. He took off towards the dressing room and after a few gallops slid into his beloved Mirpur turf and waited for his teammates to catch up. Behind him was a captain who has emboldened the whole team. The Youtube video views counter will tell the story of the importance of that moment more than any words can.

It was all so different four years ago. The occasion was an Asia Cup final, reached through Bangladesh's best sustained performance in a tournament till date. The Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was similarly decked out. The equation was brought down to 19 from 12 and most importantly, Riyad was there on 10. There was also a no-

ball in the penultimate over, but in the end, with four to win off the last ball, Riyad was stranded at the non-striker's end and so the Tigers lost, by the cruel margin of two runs.

It was 18 from two overs yesterday. Riyad was on nine. It wasn't a final, but a place in the final was at stake. The poetry started to take shape then. Fate conspired against Bangladesh four years ago but Lady Luck, through Mohammad Sami's left foot, was firmly on Bangladesh's side last night. A catch at long off off Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's bat disallowed because of a no-ball, and three runs shaved off. But the second no-ball of the over had nothing to do with the fair maiden of fortune. It was all

Go
Tigers
Go



Riyad, who in one shot exemplified why he is so valuable, although his calm under pressure reached mystical levels. A near yorker-length ball was squeezed with the easiest of bat flourishes past point for four as if there was no pressure, no need to put any muscle into the shot. The rest will be history.

"The final of the Asia Cup in 2012 was on my mind, this win will help us forget that," Riyad said moments after his winning hit had taken Bangladesh to her second Asia Cup final. When celebrations died down a little, he confided: "My pain has reduced a bit."

The pain may have lessened, but the memory of that March day in 2012 is too valuable. It is that pain which has brought them here and heightened Riyad's determination. Well, that and his impossible calm.



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'Biggest win in T20s'

BISHWAJIT ROY

Mahmudullah Riyad slid across the green grass immediately after smacking the winning boundary, his teammates ran towards him from the dressing room and leapt upon him. That was followed by the players, including captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, and officials embracing each other amidst deafening roars from the stands. The celebration was unbound as the Tigers came out from their self-imposed shell of keeping themselves in check after winning matches.

There was every reason to celebrate it with the same vigour as their initial 50-over successes because the five-wicket victory against Pakistan not only took them to another Asia Cup final but is probably the harbinger of similar displays in a format that was thought to be their weakest. Mashrafe also hinted during the post-match briefing that more celebrations were in the offing. "I am very normal... if I speak about the feeling it's really good... every win is good but we are playing the final so this is a lot more enjoyable. Honestly speaking I am still normal, but I don't know what will happen afterwards," said Mashrafe, trying to keep his emotions in check.

However, the charismatic Tigers leader, the father-figure of the team which has already taken the country to new heights on the world stage, did not wait to say that his boys should keep their feet on the ground as new achievements only raise hopes and responsibility.

"Now only the final is left. After winning three matches the boys are confident but I will still tell everyone to stay grounded and will request everyone not to create any unnecessary pressure because no one was sure whether or not we would play the final. But I must thank the boys who made it possible," said Mashrafe.

The Bangladesh skipper termed the win as one of Bangladesh's biggest in T20 cricket.

"One of the best wins, I would say. As far as T20 is concerned it is one of the biggest wins. On the other hand it came at a time when a very important tournament is coming up for us where we have to play and qualify as well. The boys can take a boost from this victory," said an excited Mashrafe.

He also stressed the importance of his team not taking too much pressure, saying that they did not enter the tournament with the expectation of becoming champions, but should still have the confidence to be able to execute their plans. "When we lost the first match I still thought that we could play the final," he added.

"When two fours were hit, he [Riyad] asked me if he should take a chance. I didn't want him to be doubtful, so I told him to do whatever was possible.

"I was sure that we could win if we went to the last over. I wanted him [Riyad] to hit the winning shot. I wanted him to hit the ball," he continued.

But the main component behind the Tigers' sudden success in T20 cricket was probably best pointed out by Pakistan coach Waqar Younis. "They have got some really good fast bowlers, especially Taskin [Ahmed]. I thought he bowled really well, they are growing with time."

BD-PAK SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN	R/B	4/6		
Manzoor c Mushfiqur b Al-Amin	1/7	0/0		
Sharjeel b Sunny	10/8	1/1		
Hafeez lbw b Mashrafe	2/11	0/0		
Sarfraz not out	58/42	5/2		
Akmal c Shakib b Taskin	4/11	0/0		
Malik c Sabbir b Sunny	41/30	5/1		
Afridi c Sabbir b Al-Amin	0/2	0/0		
Anwar c Sabbir b Al-Amin	13/9	1/0		
Extras:	0	0		
Total: (for 7 wickets in 20 overs)	129			
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-12, 3-18, 4-28, 5-98, 6-102, 7-129.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Taskin	4	1	14	1
Al-Amin	4	0	25	3
Sunny	4	0	35	2
Mashrafe	4	0	29	1
Shakib	4	0	26	0
BANGLADESH	R/B	4/6		
Tamim lbw b Irfan	7/4	0/1		
Soumya b Amir	48/48	5/1		
Sabbir b Afridi	14/15	1/0		
Mushfiqur lbw b Malik	12/15	0/0		
Shakib b Amir	8/13	0/0		
Mahmudullah not out	22/15	2/1		
Mashrafe not out	12/7	2/0		
Extras: (lb-4, w-2, nb-2)	8			
Total: (for 5 wickets in 19.1 overs)	131			
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-46, 3-83, 4-88, 5-104.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Amir	4	0	26	2
Irfan	4	0	23	1
Sami	4	0	30	0
Afridi	4	0	20	1
Anwar	2.1	0	25	0
Malik	1	0	3	1
Result: Bangladesh won by 5 wickets.				
Player-of-the-match: Soumya Sarkar.				

The Mashrafe effect

NAIMUL KARIM



Whatever Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has touched since becoming captain has turned to gold and yesterday was a classic example.

He had arrived at the crease in the 18th over when Mohammad Amir was steaming in with his piercing, in-swinging yorkers.

He had just demolished Shakib Al Hasan with one of those perfect deliveries. The scenario was so intense and the delivery was so appropriate that it had compelled Shakib to lose his mind for a split-second and swing wildly at the broken stumps after his fall.

It was precisely after that when a slightly unprepared Bangladesh captain stepped out of the dressing room and went to the crease amidst fear from the stands of another piercing yorker.

Against the odds he managed two boundaries. The first one, off his first ball, was a flat-batted swing down the ground; he was expecting that full delivery. The second one though squared him up. He just had enough



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was faced with the daunting task of seeing out Pakistan ace Mohammed Amir's over, but instead of covering, the fearless skipper hit two fours.

PHOTO: STAR

time to put bat on ball and edge one over the keeper's head. And those shots will go down in the annals of Bangladesh cricket as landmark blows from the bravehearted cricketer.

"At that point in time the ball was reversing a bit. So our coach asked me if I should take a chance if Shakib gets out before the last ball of that over. After a ball, Shakib got out and I decided to take the chance," Mashrafe narrated while recalling the minutes before that

crucial moment. "The first ball I got was in my slot. The second one... well the ball just hit my bat and went for a four. Honestly I was a bit lucky," he smiled.

"The best thing is that after Shakib's wicket, I arrived at the crease with no pressure on me. I never thought about getting out. Regarding Shakib's shot [an attempted scoop], I would say that it was fine. He plays that shot well in training. He took a calculated risk," he added.

Sussex board Fizz train

SPORTS REPORTER

It seems as though the entire world wants a piece of Mustafizur Rahman at the moment. He was signed up for the Pakistan Super League, although he did not go to play there due to an injury and then the Sunrisers Hyderabad signed him up for the Indian Premier League (IPL) after a heated contest at the auctions.

The latest news is that the 20-year-old pacer, affectionately called Fizz, will be playing for Sussex in England for this year's NatWest T20 Blast competition. Sussex Cricket made the announcement through their website yesterday. Mustafizur is the first Bangladeshi player to play for Sussex and the third to play for an England county. Shakib Al Hasan represented Worcestershire and Leicestershire while Tamim Iqbal played for Nottinghamshire.

Regarding his move to Sussex, Mustafizur said: "I am very excited to get an opportunity in county cricket. It has always been an ambition of mine to play in England and I am thankful to Sussex

for this opportunity. I hope I can repay the faith they have shown in me with my performances on the field."

Sussex head coach Mark Davis was extremely excited to see his side sign up the player.

"I am really excited to have Mustafizur join us at Sussex Cricket. He is a cricketer with incredible ability and is currently one of the brightest young talents in world cricket.

"His unorthodox bowling variations make him a very difficult customer to bat against, and he will be a brilliant addition to our team," said Davis.

He is available for the whole of the Sharks' NatWest T20 Blast campaign, subject to Hyderabad's IPL progress.

At the moment the left-arm pacer is busy working on his recovery from the side strain that has ruled him out of the ongoing Asia Cup T20. He is working on a rehabilitation programme in a bid to be fit in time for the ICC World Twenty20.

Since 2015, Mustafizur has been Bangladesh's highest wicket-taker. He has scalped a total of 43 wickets in international cricket and has troubled opponents from all over the world.



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

India face UAE today

SPORTS REPORTER

The United Arab Emirates may not have shocked any of the teams in the Asia Cup T20 so far, and they are highly unlikely to create an upset in their final encounter against an in-form Indian side at Mirpur today, but that does not mean that the men from the Gulf should not be acclaimed for their performance in the competition.

Their bowlers troubled every side they played against and it depicted the immense potential that the team has. In their last game against Pakistan, they almost opened their account after their batsmen managed some late hits to post a decent 129. Had they managed to post 15 more runs things may have been a lot different.

Their skipper Amjad Javed and pacer Mohammad Naved have been their go-to players and the UAE will hope they can provide one last hurrah against the Indians.

As far as India is concerned, going by skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni's statement after the game against Sri Lanka on Tuesday, they are likely to employ a number of changes to their squad for the game.



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INDIA vs UAE
HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

INDIA			UAE		
M	W	L	M	W	L
1	1	0	1	0	1

IN ALL T20IS
The teams have never met before in T20is

KEY PLAYERS

ASHISH NEHRA	AMJAD JAVED
17	14
25	20
20	17.85
8.06	7.7
3-19	3-25
0	0
0	5w