



Young pacer Taskin Ahmed (L) and opening batsman Soumya Sarkar, sitting next to Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (C), cannot think of better hands than their inspirational captain to safely drive them to their destination to enjoy a well-earned day off yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Elegant aggression

BISHWAJIT ROY

Is Mahmudullah Riyadh's batting suited to T20 cricket? The once-burning question has probably become a foolish one now. The elegant right-hander has so far scored 7, 36 not out, 23 and 22 in the ongoing Asia Cup T20; from a statistical viewpoint the numbers may not set the world alight, but the impact of his last three innings in Bangladesh's progress to the final of the regional event has been immense.

On February 22, two days before the start of the tournament proper, Riyadh responded to a question about his batting plan with an impish smile, saying he will try to hit his first ball for six. "You can say it was a humorous answer because I sensed that there was some doubt over my T20 ability in that question," said the soft-spoken cricketer while talking to this reporter yesterday.

General perception regarding the right-hander's silky-smooth batting was that it is nice to watch but can only be fruitful if the batsman gets some time, so questions were also raised about his batting position in the T20 line-up, but Riyadh has proven everybody wrong. "I am not doing anything to prove anyone wrong; I am simply trying to give my best to fulfil my team's demand. I have been practising hard to switch my batting to this format and gradually getting the results," said the humble Riyadh.

Refreshingly, Riyadh is not executing the big hits at the expense of the inherent elegance in his batting.

In this there is an echo in the methods of the batsmen marked by greatness present in the tournament. An image that will stick in the mind is that of Rohit Sharma leaning forward to caress a Mashrafe Bin Mortaza delivery all along the ground through cover, which briefly transported the spectator from the night of a T20 game to an afternoon session of a Test match.

Virat Kohli also showed that class and calibre matter, especially when conditions demand high skill from a batsman.

It is similarly hard to forget some of Riyadh's shots such as when he cleared his front foot and flicked a near yorker-length delivery from Nuwan Kulasekara with great timing over square leg's head. And then there was that magnificent boundary against Mohammad Sami.

It was a no-ball but the way he split the gap between point and short third man under such pressure cannot take anything away from his mastery.

"The sense of application is very important. I think I could not do anything other than hit the ball that way. What I understand is that one needs to bat with a clear mind to be successful in this format. I think the last BPL (Bangladesh Premier League) helped me lot," said Riyadh. He also emphasised on playing to one's strengths. "It's very much possible to be successful in T20 cricket by playing proper cricketing shots. One may be strong at the scoop, one may be good at the reverse-sweep or other shots, but I believe one needs to play to his strength," he added.

There were many who doubted for a while as Mahmudullah could not justify his calibre, but the right-hander finally showed his talent to the world during the last World Cup in Australia-New Zealand, where he not only hit Bangladesh's first World Cup century but also added another one to his name.

"It was a huge learning curve for me when I had been going through a rough patch and was under tremendous pressure. True hard work brings you success but you also need the mental toughness which I think is helping me a lot," said Riyadh.

It's said that a batsman starts delivering from the age of 25 after gaining all the experience, and the 30-year old Riyadh may be at his prime time to justify his talent. "Yes, experience matters," the man from Mymensingh said, hinting at more success in the coming days.



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'Pace is my strength'

NAIMUL KARIM

Taskin Ahmed has gone through several ups and downs in the last one year. It just seemed like every time he hit top gear, an injury would peg him back.

Therefore, to see him steam in and perform the way he has in the Asia Cup so far has been a delight for many of his fans. In a way, it was his performance yesterday that helped the Tigers overcome the absence of Mustafizur Rahman.

His bowling figures against Pakistan read 1 for 14, but the best part is that he had given away just two runs in his first three overs.

"My strength is my pace and all I tried to do was bowl fast and land the ball on my desired position on the wicket. I knew that if I could bowl in the right areas it would be difficult for the batsman.

"No matter what happened, I was

adamant on bowling the right line and I was able to execute my plan. I guess that's why I didn't give too many runs," said Taskin.

His bowling might have been impeccable yesterday, but just a few months ago, the scenario was a bit different.

He struggled during the Bangladesh Premier League as he was in the process of recovering from an injury. His poor performance also led to him missing out on the first three matches against Zimbabwe after the BPL. He was included in the last game, in which he bowled reasonably well and that paved the way for his return to the World Twenty20 squad.

"During the BPL I wasn't in good shape. I think apart from a few games, I couldn't bowl well in the league. And then in the Zimbabwe series I think I was alright. It was only after that that things changed.

"The training camps in Chittagong and Khulna helped me a lot. My

workload was increased a lot and I spent extra hours practising. That helped me execute my plans," said Taskin.

"And honestly speaking, when you play for your country, you find that extra enthusiasm that drives you," he added.

While he has bowled well in the tournament, he hasn't managed to scalp the number of wickets he deserved, mainly due to some poor fielding. It therefore was not a surprise to see Taskin a tad nervous when he forced Umar Akmal to hit one in the air during the game on Wednesday.

"When that ball went up the air I was just praying that please make him [Shakib Al Hasan] catch the ball. I was just a bit tense because a number of catches were dropped off my bowling prior to that," a smiling Taskin explained.

Taskin thinks it a big honour to be able to play in the Asia Cup final, and believes the Tigers can beat India if they play their best.

A mad scoop & a crazy swipe

SAKEB SUBHAN

Amid the euphoria of Bangladesh's ascension to the Asia Cup T20 final there was the less auspicious development of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan being fined half his match fee and receiving an official reprimand for breaching Level 1 of the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) code of conduct during the five-wicket victory over Pakistan on Wednesday.

In the 18th over of Bangladesh's chase Shakib was bowled by Mohammad Amir when he missed a scoop shot and his frustration boiled over as he spun around and took a wild swing at the stumps. Shakib apologised to the square leg umpire immediately. He was found guilty of breaching article 2.1.8 of relating to "abuse of cricket equipment or clothing, ground

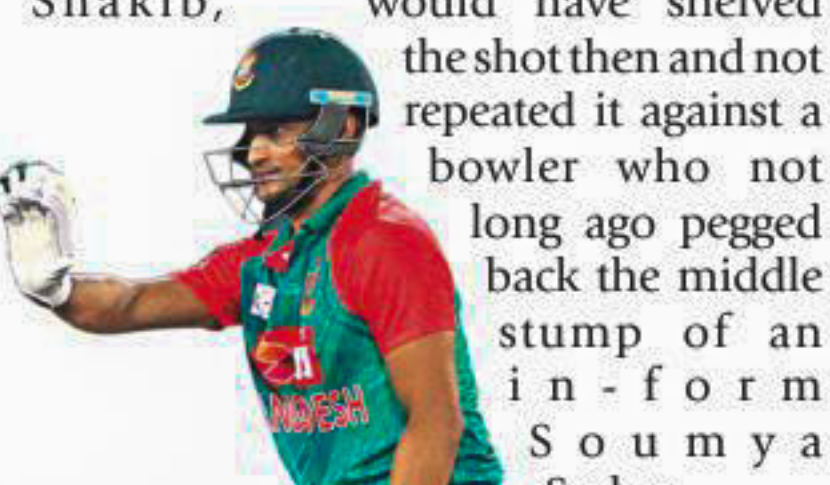
equipment or fixtures and fittings during an International Match", and he accepted the sanctions imposed by the match referee.

Apart from the impulsive swipe, the action that preceded it may cause Bangladesh fans more concern. Presumably he was the source of his own frustration, and in that respect it was justified. His wicket at that stage in the match could well have robbed Bangladesh of a landmark win if skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mahmudullah Riyadh had not come to the rescue. More importantly, the manner of his dismissal -- trying to play a scoop against a fast bowler adept at bowling lethal yorkers -- was a poor one, especially coming from the side's most experienced T20 player.

Mashrafe said after the match that it was a shot Shakib played and practised well, but the feeling remains that if the Tigers went on to lose the game the finger of blame would be pointed at

Shakib. The oft-repeated sporting cliché states that it is important to focus on processes rather than results. In that regard one would hope that Shakib, who is working his way back into form, sees his shot selection in that light -- separate from the joyous outcome of the match.

The shot seems even more ill-advised considering what happened in the previous over. He tried the scoop against Mohammad Irfan and the ball thudded into the pad which was fortunately outside the line of the stumps, but bat was nowhere near the ball. A calmer mind, which has come to be expected of Shakib, would have shelved the shot then and not repeated it against a bowler who not long ago pegged back the middle stump of an in-form Soumya Sarkar.



Chartered plane for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday revealed that the International Cricket Council (ICC) arranged for the Tigers a chartered flight from Delhi to Dharamsala, where they will play in the World Twenty20 qualifiers.

Bangladesh were supposed to reach Delhi on March 7 after the Asia Cup T20 final on March 6, and reach Dharamsala on March 8. But that would not give the Tigers a day at the venue before their first match on March 9 against the Netherlands.

The schedule however was eventually changed. The Tigers will leave Dhaka on March 7 and reach Dharamsala on the same day.

"We tried to arrange a chartered flight on our own initially. But we were told that one needs special permission to land big planes in Dharamsala. We were about to arrange a smaller plane, but the ICC told us that they would make the necessary arrangements," BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon told The Daily Star yesterday.



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HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	M	W	L
14	4	10	14	10	4

IN ALL T20IS

M	W	L	M	W	L
14	9	5	14	5	9

Last Meeting: 1 August, 2015, 2nd T20I in Colombo. Pakistan won by one wicket.

KEY PLAYERS

MOHAMMAD IRFAN	DUSHMANTHA CHAMEERA
16	Inns 9
11	Wkts 10
35	Ave 25.7
7.04	Econ 8.51
2/25	Best 3/30
0	4w 0
0	5w 0




Bangladesh ace Shakib Al Hasan holds his hands up apologetically after losing his temper and swinging his bat at the stumps during the Asia Cup T20 match against Pakistan on Wednesday. PHOTO: STAR FILE

SL and Pak to play for pride

SPORTS REPORTER

Today's Asia Cup T20 match between Sri Lanka and Pakistan would have been seen as a marquee encounter before the tournament began. But when the two sides square off at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, they will be playing only for pride as they have already lost the race to the March 6 final and the two finalists were decided when Bangladesh beat Pakistan on Wednesday.

However, with the ICC World Twenty20 coming up hot on the heels of the Asia Cup, no match is meaningless. Both teams will be looking to use this match as an opportunity to tinker with their line-ups and try to unearth their best combination.

As far as Asia Cup matches go, Sri Lanka are at a massive advantage, having won 10 of their 14 matches so far in the competition. Pakistan however have a marked edge in T20I matches between the two nations,

having come out on top on nine of the 14 matches they have contested in this format.

Head-to-heads, however, do not mean much in T20 cricket. What will matter more are their recent displays in this tournament. Both sides have appeared a pale imitation of the Asian giants they are supposed to be. Both have a solitary victory against qualifiers UAE, achieved with much trouble.

Pakistan will bank on their bowling attack, spearheaded by the excellent Mohammad Amir, to cause some damage. Their batting and bowling however, remain the worst among the ICC Full-Member nations in this tournament.

Sri Lanka also have a misfiring batting department, although with the presence of players like Angelo Mathews, Tillakaratne Dilshan and Dinesh Chandimal, there is a greater chance of their batting clicking on the day. On the other hand, their bowling is far weaker than Pakistan's, especially if skipper Lasith Malinga continues to sit out due to injury.