



Mashrafe keeping it in perspective

SPORTS REPORTER

The landmarks that Bangladesh have aced in the last one-and-a-half years have been incredible. The year 2015 has time and again been described as the best year in the history of Bangladesh's cricket.

The quarterfinal berth in the World Cup and the series wins against Pakistan, India and South Africa helped the Tigers catapult themselves into their best ever position in world cricket.

However, nearly 11 months later Bangladesh are in a bit of a pickle. A fortified territory that some of the world's best teams could not breach last year is now in danger of collapsing against the most unexpected of opponents -- Afghanistan.

If the Afghans manage to win the third ODI today, they will have done something India, Pakistan and South Africa could not in the last one-and-a-half years: beat Bangladesh at home.

Statistically speaking, a defeat for the Tigers on Saturday may not look too bad. It will only be their seventh in the last 21 games. It can by no means undo all the good work that the Tigers have done for so long. But what it will do is pose several questions and compel them to be in a state of vulnerability ahead of the England series.

And that is an environment that Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza does not want his team to be in.

"I don't think that losing one game should overshadow all our achievements so far," Mashrafe told reporters during the pre-match press conference at Mirpur yesterday.

"We are obviously all disappointed, but that does not mean that we have forgotten all the good work that we have done. We had a bad day [during the second ODI] and this can happen in any sport. If we keep that in

our mind and get on the field for the final ODI, then it will be difficult for all of us. We have to be calm mentally," added the skipper.

The main problem for Mashrafe and co in this series has been the failure of the batsmen. Despite getting starts, they just have not been able to continue and score big. That is an aspect Mashrafe hopes his batters can address in the third ODI.

"I don't think there is a problem with the thought process of our batsmen. None of them are being complacent. We have had discussions. If someone could have scored a 150 in this series, it would have been a big plus for his career.

"That's something that Kumar Sangakkara used to do against us. He scored 100s and 200s against us. I just think there has been a bit of a break in their concentration process," explained Mashrafe.

"Before the start of the series many people thought that this would be easy. But my team and I always knew that the Afghans were going to be tough opponents. And that's clear after the first and second games. But still, we never expected not to play our best game. Credit to Afghanistan, they have done well, but we need to improve our game as well," he added.

An interesting question was raised towards the end of the press conference. "Would you describe a series defeat at the hands of Afghanistan as an upset?" asked a reporter.

Mashrafe's reply suggested that despite the tension in the air, caused by the danger of losing a series to an Associate Member Nation, he remained firmly grounded.

"If they win, they will be the deserving winners. We have won so many matches during such circumstances in the past and they were termed as upsets and that wasn't right. If they win, they should definitely get the credit," concluded Mashrafe.



Shikhar Dhawan may be sporting a brand new haircut, but an old story will hold true when Bangladesh take the field; the ace all-rounder will have to shine if Bangladesh are to clinch the series decider against Afghanistan in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Siddikur makes cut in Taiwan

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman squeezed into the final two rounds of the Mercurys Taiwan Masters after aggregating six-over-par (150) yesterday. The 31-year-old golfer, who had started the day on 51st position, played out two-over-par on Friday to move up nine places and avoid the cut by two strokes.

The two-time Asian Tour winner had carded four-over-par in the opening round.

A total of 51 golfers made it to the weekend rounds, with Panuphol Pittayarat leading the pack at six-under-par (138).

Aus wilt under de Kock fury

STAR SPORT DESK

Opener Quinton de Kock made a mockery out of a challenging total as South Africa cantered home with 82 balls to spare in chase of Australia's 294 for nine in the first ODI in Centurion yesterday.

De Kock hit a 113-ball 178 studded with 16 fours and 11 sixes, and put on a 145-run opening stand with Rilee Rossouw (63 off 45) to make a challenging chase look like a cakewalk. He was the fourth wicket to fall with the score on 280 in the 34th over.

Earlier, rookie South Africa pacer Andile Phehlukwayo picked up four for 44 after Australia were asked to bat. George Bailey top-scored with 74.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 294 for 9 (Bailey 74, Hastings 51, Warner 40; Phehlukwayo 4-44, Steyn 2-65)

SOUTH AFRICA: 295 for 4 in 36.2 overs (de Kock 178, Rossouw 63, du Plessis 26; Boland 3-67)

Result: South Africa won by 6 wickets
Player-of-the-match: Q de Kock

Will be our biggest win: Shahidi

SPORTS REPORTER



Hashmatullah Shahidi scored a brilliant 72 in the first ODI. But he got out and left the pitch towards the end, at a time when his country needed him to take them over the line in a match Afghanistan eventually lost.

A similar occurrence took place in the second ODI. The visitors dominated a majority of the game and yet crumbled in the last 10 overs. A match that they should have won before the game entered the last five overs, was dragged on till the last over.

21-year-old Shahidi knows that if Afghanistan are to create history on Saturday, the visitors will need to improve their finishing.

The only Test team that they have ever beaten in a series is Zimbabwe. When asked if winning a series against Bangladesh would be the biggest achievement in Afghanistan's cricketing history so far, a confident Shahidi replied, "Yeah. It will be!"

"It's the first time we are playing against Bangladesh in their home and it will not be the last time, inshallah. Our plan is to play good cricket against each team. Not only Bangladesh but against other Test nations as well. Hopefully we can win matches in the future as well," said Shahidi during the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"Everyone knows Bangladesh is one of the best sides in the world, especially at home. They beat big teams like South Africa, India and Pakistan. We already

feel better [after beating Bangladesh].

"We will learn from the mistakes that we did in the first two games. We will apply what our coach and captain said to us and hopefully this will be a very good match," explained Shahidi.

The impressive aspect about this team is that none of them seem too emotional. They did not celebrate or go haywire after winning the second ODI and going by Shahidi's statements yesterday, they do not seem to be viewing this series win opportunity as a game-changer for Afghanistan cricket.

It seems as though that they have accepted the fact that they will have to do a lot more than just win one series against Bangladesh. And that is perhaps one of the reasons why every question that Shahidi answered had a tinge of calmness to it. For the Afghans, their main target seems to be to put in a good performance here and increase the number of matches that they get to play against Test nations every year.

"If you see, in the last one year, Afghanistan's cricket has been improving. Before we had Inzamamul Haq and he did very well. Now we have [Lalchand] Rajput sir and he is trying hard. He has given us a lot of confidence. He has told us that we are one of the best sides in the world.

"He is working on our batting and is teaching us how to play the entire 50 overs. You know, like play till the end and concentrate on singles and things like that," explained Shahidi.

Their long-term goal is to be a Test nation soon. And in order to reach that goal, they hope to continue putting in such threatening performances.



After taming the Tigers in the second ODI, the Afghans, sensing an upset might be on the cards in today's decider, were pictured joshing around during their training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

'No issues with Mushy'

SPORTS REPORTER



Mushfiqur Rahim may be one of the most consistent and hardworking batsmen of the national team. But in the last year or so he has been making headlines for a few unfortunate reasons.

He was heavily criticised for not finishing the game against India in the World Twenty20. Soon after, sections of the Indian media came down hard on him after he posted a tweet celebrating India's defeat against the West Indies. He was compelled to delete that soon after.

He was at the centre of discussion after Bangladesh's defeat to Afghanistan in the second ODI as well, when he missed a crucial stumping chance in the second-last over of the second ODI.

It therefore was not a surprise when a question was raised regarding the player during the pre-match press conference ahead of the third and final ODI against Afghanistan at Mirpur yesterday. Is the team a bit concerned about Mushfiqur?

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza however said that he had no complaints about the wicketkeeper-batsman.

"Look, each person has a different thought process. If you look at Mushfiqur's professional aspect, you will see that he is a step ahead of all of us. Mushfiqur gives a hundred per cent from that aspect. If you have complaints about him,

then you can have complaints about us as well.

"It's not right to blame Mushfiqur for the defeat. Had we scored 20 more runs in that game, we would have won that match," explained Mashrafe.

"With regards to his personal decisions, I can't say much. For instance, his decision not to talk to the media. That's his call and I can't say anything about that. But if you talk about his attitude and professionalism as a player, I have no complaints. We are not concerned," added Mashrafe.



Although knives were out for Mushfiqur Rahim when he let off Najibullah Zadran at a crucial time in the second ODI, the team has kept faith in his professionalism and attention to detail. PHOTO: STAR

WI surrender to Pak spin

STAR SPORT DESK

West Indies' batsmen continued to be clueless against Pakistan's spin bowling as they crumbled to a 111-run loss on the Duckworth-Lewis method in the first of three ODIs in Sharjah yesterday.

A 70-minute floodlight failure reduced the match to 49 overs a side. After being sent in, Pakistan rode on number three Babar Azam's 131-ball 120 to post a challenging 284 for nine.

In reply, only Marlon Samuels put up any resistance with a 59-ball 46 as West Indies were bowled out for 175. Pakistan's left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz picked up four for 42.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 284 for 9 in 49 overs (Babar 120, Sharjeel 54, Sarfaraz 35; C Brathwaite 3-53, Holder 1-35)

WEST INDIES: 175 all out in 38.4 overs (Samuels 46, Narine 23, Charles 20; Nawaz 4-42, Hasan 3-14, Amir 1-21)

Result: Pakistan won by 111 runs (D/L method)

Pujara, Rahane keep India afloat

AFP, Kolkata



New Zealand bowlers put India on the backfoot despite fighting fifties from Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane, to leave the hosts on 239 for seven on Friday in the second Test.

New Zealand's recalled pace bowler Matt Henry and off-spinner Jeetan Patel shared five wickets between them on the first day of a must-win match for the visitors in Kolkata.

Wriddhiman Saha was on 14 and Ravindra Jadeja was yet to score when bad light stopped play at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

Pujara and Rahane put together 141 runs for the fourth wicket after India, who elected to bat first, were in trouble early at 46 for three.

New Zealand need to win to keep their series hopes alive after India secured a 197-run victory in the first of the three matches.

Henry claimed the scalps of openers Shikhar Dhawan, who disappointed on his return, scoring just one run, and Murali Vijay.

Trent Boult piled on the pressure to claim the big wicket of Indian skipper Virat Kohli, who was guilty of chasing a wide delivery, as Tom Latham took a splendid catch at gully.

The in-form Pujara, who played a key role in India's win in Kanpur, then struck his

third consecutive half-century of the series.

Coming in at number three, Pujara built his innings patiently and hit 17 boundaries during 219-ball stay at the crease.

Pace bowler Neil Wagner plotted Pujara's wicket with a consistent line outside the off stump, which finally got the batsman to drive uppishly and be caught at short cover.

Rahane, who hit his ninth Test fifty, tackled the New Zealand bowlers with aplomb, until he was done in by Patel's wily off spin in the final session.

Ravichandran Ashwin, whose 26-run cameo was laced with 4 boundaries, also tried to counter attack, but became Henry's third victim of the day, trapped lbw.

India, who denied the visitors a wicket in the post-lunch play, lost four of their batsmen in the final session that was dominated by the bowlers.

At the start of the match, World Cup winning captain Kapil Dev rang a bell newly installed at the iconic Eden Gardens, following a similar tradition at Lord's.

Ross Taylor is captaining New Zealand in the absence of Kane Williamson, who was ruled out with a virus.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 239 for 7 (Pujara 87, Kohli 9, Rahane 77, Ashwin 26, Saha 14 not out; Henry 3-35, Patel 2-66)