

SPORT

Relaxed aggression the way to go: Mash

SAKEB SUBHAN from Colombo

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is the truly larger than life figure in the Bangladesh cricket team. On the field he will pay no mind to his heavily strapped knees, knees that barely allow him to walk unfettered, as he bowls with fire with the new ball and in the spur of the moment dives full-length to stop the ball on his follow-through even though there is a fielder behind him to stop the single. His fans may fret in fear of another injury, but living in the present seems to be Mashrafe's motto -- if the prize is in front of him, he will grab it with little thought to consequence.

Off the field he is the life of the party, joking around with teammates and striking entertaining conversations with the media men who most of the players keep at an arm's length.

He is also Bangladesh's most successful ODI captain, having won 24 out of the 39 matches he captained, and he will stand on the cusp of arguably his greatest triumph -- winning an away series over a higher-ranked opponent -- when Bangladesh take the field at 10:00am (Bangladesh time) today for the third and final ODI against Sri Lanka with a 1-0 advantage.

It is said of the most successful captains that they forge a team in their own image, and Mashrafe seemed to be calling upon the team to display qualities he has in spades in order to bring the series home.

"It is very difficult to play with too much caution, because you cannot play your best that way," Mashrafe responded to a question about whether they will look to mix caution with confidence when the skipper was speaking at a pre-match press conference at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground, the venue of the match, yesterday. "Either you will have to be in a defensive mode or you have to be attacking. And if you want to

win a game of cricket, you can't do it being defensive."

He then talked about the second quality which he thought was important for the team to do well. "I think being relaxed is very important, because the team has won two matches on the trot -- a Test and an ODI. So being relaxed is very important and to play according to the plans put in place. But I will always want that we play the aggressive game."

Although a win here will probably fall just short of the sense of achievement that the Test team created by defeating Sri Lanka for the first time in Bangladesh's 100th Test earlier on the tour, it will be another seminal moment as most of Bangladesh's memorable triumphs in ODIs have come at home. If they win today, they will have defeated a higher-ranked opponent away from home for the first time, barring the 2009 series win against a West Indies fielding a second-string side due to a contract dispute.

"If we can win it will of course feel very good. But for that we have to play very good cricket," said Mashrafe. "If you see the last match, they scored 300. Obviously the wicket was very good, but maybe we have to try to minimise 20-25 runs from that. Where they can score 300, we have to keep it to 280."

"There really is nothing to answer. Those who ask these questions are Bangladeshi, we who are playing are also Bangladeshi," said Mashrafe when asked if winning today would be a fitting riposte to the doubters.

"They will of course have expectations. Maybe everything does not pan out according to expectations. But this is also true, and people have to understand that the world over away matches are always difficult. We will become a truly good team only when we also start winning maximum matches away. I said earlier, before the New Zealand series, that a real test is starting for us -- that most of the matches we have won, we have won at home, now it is about away matches."



Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will be looking forward to securing a rare away series win as the Tigers face Sri Lanka in the third and final ODI at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground today.

PHOTO: AFP

SSC and the dreaded 300

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



In the lead-up to the final match of the three-match ODI-series against Sri Lanka, although Bangladesh have looked the superior outfit, a major sticking point has been the second ODI being abandoned due to rain after Sri Lanka had scored 311.

A score greater than 300 has never been chased in Sri Lanka, so the general perception is that Bangladesh, who cannot lose the series now after having won the first match by 90 runs, were a little lucky to be in the situation they are in now. Therefore, the word 300 was heard a lot in press conferences yesterday.

"History has always changed. History is brought about because of change. I think they batted really well, but from our point we were

very much confident, because the wicket was really good," said Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza when a local journalist asked him if Bangladesh were lucky to be 1-0 up.

"We knew that if there was a good partnership in the top order it was gettable because of the wicket. Our boys have been really positive; that was nice to see from the dressing room. But I would say, if you are going to chase anything over 300, it is always going to be difficult."

With the number 300 looming, sights turned to the pitch at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) ground. The venue is hosting an ODI match for the first time since February 2011.

"I have heard that 270-290 is the average score [here], which means that it can also go over 300," said Mashrafe. "I think we have to be mentally prepared for that, so if we can keep them below 300 it will be easier for the batsmen."

But 300 may not be as important as thought; the average first innings score in the 29 matches that teams batting first have played the full 50 overs is actually 243 at the SSC, while there have only been two scores over 300 in the 59 matches played here. Even more surprisingly the average total for sides batting first in List A matches here is 146. So 300 may not be the number to look out for today. According to Sri Lanka manager Asanka Gurusinha, there is a bit of grass on the surface that may encourage the seamers early on.

Also, since today's game will be a day game, the coin may not be as important as it was in Dambulla.

"The toss was very important [in Dambulla]. If you bat first, scoring 300 is very easy," said Mashrafe. "Maybe the ball would have swung a little bit at night in the first 10 overs, which is very difficult. Since this is a day game, we will not have that worry."



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal has been the standout batsman in Sri Lanka and the visitors will hope that his form continues in today's crucial match.

PHOTO: AFP

Time to overcome Sri Lankan barriers

SPORTS REPORTER



Today is the day for Bangladesh to overcome Sri Lankan barriers on the cricket field.

While Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will lead Bangladesh out at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground in Colombo to play the final ODI against the home side and record a rare away series win, Mominul Haque will lead Bangladesh U-23 in Chittagong in hopes of taking a big step towards fulfilling his dream of winning the Emerging Teams Asia Cup by beating his Sri Lankan counterparts.

In the first semifinal, Bangladesh Under-23 will play against a strong Sri Lanka Under-23 side at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium; a venue the team management believe will favour the hosts. The second semifinal between Pakistan and Afghanistan will also take place today, at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong.

"Yes, both the matches are important for us because a win in Sri Lanka will give us a rare series victory away from home and a success in Chittagong will take us to the final of the tournament," national selector and Under-23 team manager Habibul Bashar said with a smile while talking to reporters yesterday.

Bashar said that he was looking to the

young players for today's match.

"Our senior players have made huge contributions so far in the group matches, but honestly speaking the young players are yet to fulfil my expectation as it's a tournament for emerging cricketers," said Bashar.

"We played good cricket so far and I am confident that this team has got the ability to overcome the Sri Lankan challenge in the semifinal. I am looking to young players like Saif Hasan, Afif Hossain and Nazmul Hossain Shanto and I believe they will step up tomorrow," he continued.

The former national captain added that he expected better performances from his team as his side's players were familiar with the venue.

"Batting was a bit difficult in Cox's Bazar but I saw the wicket here [at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium] which gave me the impression that it will be a good batting track. Our players played lot of matches here so it will be an added advantage for them," opined Bashar.

On way to reaching the semifinal, Bangladesh comprehensively beat Hong Kong and Nepal and tied their last group match against a formidable Pakistan, while Sri Lanka bounced back from the defeat in their first match against India and beat Afghanistan and Malaysia comprehensively to seal top spot in their group.



Coach Mizanur Rahman (C) speaks to Nayeem Islam and Azmir Ahmed (R) during a practice session in Chittagong yesterday, ahead of today's Emerging Teams Asia Cup semifinal against Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Shakil dethrones Shahadat

SPORTS REPORTER

South Asian Games gold medallist Shakil Ahmed dethroned Sheikh Shahadat Hossain to win gold medal in the 10m air pistol event of Suzuki 8th National Air Gun Championship at the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan yesterday.

Shakil of Army Shooting Association, who won gold in 50m Air Pistol in SA Games last year, scored 230.8 points to ensure the top position as his teammates Anwar Hossain and Raihanul Islam bagged silver and bronze medals with scores of 226.6 points and 202.8 points respectively. Shahadat failed to finish in top three.

In junior 10m air pistol event, Shakhawat Hossain of Army Shooting Association grabbed the gold medal with a score of 222.8 points while Sabbir Al Amin and Asif Hossain Rion won silver and bronze medals after scoring 219.9 points and 192.8 points respectively.

Shaharyar resigns as PCB chief

DAWN

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Shaharyar M Khan on Thursday tendered his resignation to the Patron-in-Chief of the PCB Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during a news conference here that followed the Board of Governors (BoGs) meeting.

"I told the BoG members that I was elected as PCB chairman by them three years back, but now I have decided to abstain from candidature of PCB chairman or any other post," maintained the outgoing chairman.

Lankans search for consistency



ASANKA GURUSINHA

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

If it was said before Bangladesh's tour of Sri Lanka started that in less than a month the home team would be trying to emulate the visitors they have historically made a habit out of routinely thrashing, it would have been hard to believe. That is what Sri Lanka Cricket chairman of selectors Sanath Jayasuriya said on the eve of the washed-out second ODI in Dambulla on Monday, saying that they need to do what Bangladesh are doing with the bat, ball and in the field.

And that is what Asanka Gurusinha, who before the series started had taken over as manager of a side that was and is winless in ODIs this year, said during the pre-match press conference yesterday ahead of the third and series-deciding ODI against Bangladesh today. That the hosts are under pressure can be gauged by the fact that yesterday was the second pre-match conference in a row that Gurusinha, and not captain Upul Tharanga, faced up to the press.

"There is pressure and there will be criticism anywhere. A few years ago everyone was criticising Bangladesh and they have come up. We have to do that. We've got to cop it if we're not performing. We've got to go out there and give everything we have. Then if we lose the game, then Bangladesh have played very, very good cricket."

"There's no problem -- it's just a team that's playing a good side and getting out to some bad shots I think. We do well in patches but the consistency is where the important part is. And the patience as well," the former Sri Lanka batsman said.

Not only have the results -- a 90-run loss in the first ODI and a wash-out after scoring 311 in the second match -- gone against them, they have had injury woes too. Veteran campaigners like Lasith Malinga and regular captain Angelo Mathews were ruled out with injuries before the series started, while batsman Kusal Perera and wicketkeeper-opener Niroshan Dickwella were ruled out with injuries during the series.

"Niroshan is out for about three weeks. He had a hit on his left thumb [last Sunday during practice] actually. Initially we thought he could play but then the x-rays showed us he had a fracture," Gurusinha said, adding that he expected it to be a good match today.

"There's a little bit of grass on it [the wicket] and the ball will move a bit in the first hour to hour and a half. It'll be a good batting track at the end of the day. If you're prepared to play shots it will be good. I feel it'll be a great game tomorrow, because SSC is a great wicket."

Magical Shadab delivers again

STAR SPORT DESK



Shadab Khan delivered his second match-winning performance on the trot as Pakistan secured a three-run win over the West Indies in the second T20I on Thursday.

After an impressive T20I debut in the first match where he took three wickets for just seven runs, the leg-break bowler scalped four wickets for 14 runs -- including his first international wicket maiden -- to help the visitors defend a modest total of 132 in Trinidad.

The 18-year old -- who was added to a 31-member preliminary squad for the tour after Mickey Arthur met him during a three-day camp in Lahore on March 11 and then fast-tracked into the side -- conceded six runs in his first over, the sixth of West Indies' innings, but came back strongly and bowled his copyright googly, a delivery he used to dismiss two batsmen in the previous game, as he had opener Chadwick Walton bowled.

He went one better in the next over by taking two wickets. He first deceived Kieron Pollard, who charged down the wicket and was left stranded as the ball spun away, leaving wicketkeeper-captain Sarfraz Ahmed with a simple task, and then bowled Rovman Powell with the very next delivery, another leg-break.

With the hosts on 81 for five and with a good chance of making it to the target, Shadab bowled an incredible over, conceding no runs and having Marlon Samuels caught behind. There would be little reward for guessing that he did so with one of those patented googlies.

"He's [Shadab] bowled very well, but I think we've gifted him a few wickets. We just need to be a bit more ruthless against him and see what we require," West Indies coach Stuart Law said.