

SPORT

'Must meet our own expectations'

SPorts Reporter

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, as attacking as he is as a player and captain, usually prefers to be guarded about the team's chances before a match or a tournament. That did not change when he sat behind the microphone for the pre-tournament press conference at Birmingham, five days before Bangladesh take on home favourites England in the opener of the 2017 Champions Trophy at The Oval in London. There is plenty of reason to be cautious as Bangladesh are in the proverbial group of death with England, Australia and New Zealand.

For much of the press conference at Birmingham yesterday, Mashrafe seemed at pains to remind the audience that it will be a hard group to get through and seemed okay with the underdog tag for a team playing their first Champions Trophy after it became an eight-team event post-2006.

They qualified after being ranked seven at the cut-off point, and Bangladesh have recently improved their position to sixth after beating New Zealand in the last match of the tri-series in Dublin on Wednesday.

"For us it is a very joyous thing that we have gradually come up from nine to six. We want to go even further," said Mashrafe. "This tournament is going to be very hard for us -- we are playing in a group that is very hard and the conditions as well. But you never know, on your day you can do anything and we have some quality players who can change the game. We love to play as a team, as we have been doing so far."

"It is normal that people will think of us as underdogs; that is to be expected. But from our side we have to be clear about our expectations."



Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza speaks at a Champions Trophy pre-tournament press conference in Birmingham yesterday.

PHOTO: ICC

We want to play well here. It is hard to say about winning or losing in this group, but if we play to our expectations and according to our plans, hopefully the matches will be good and that is what we are focusing on."

So on the surface, with talk like 'on your day you can do anything' it would seem that the Bangladesh skipper is not holding out much hope as genuine contenders in this type of tournament will need more than one or two good days. But Mashrafe's competitive nature did not stay hidden too long.

"From our side we have to be clear about our own expectations," Mashrafe said when pushed further on his thoughts about Bangladesh's

chances. "It is hard to say about winning or losing in this group, but if we play to our expectations and according to our plans, then hopefully the matches will be good and that is what we are focusing on."

"Although everyone thinks of us as underdogs, they also know that if they lose to us they will miss out on a big point. Not just us; even those who are playing for the Cup [in our group] cannot say what will happen."

And that was the cue to ask whether he was focusing on the Cup too like the other teams he named. "Of course, I meant that other than us the other three teams cannot say for sure what will happen."

Importance not lost on Mash

Sports Reporter



It was in April 2015 when the two teams last met in 50-over cricket and Bangladesh simply knocked Pakistan out to whitewash them in the three-match ODI series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

When they meet at Edgbaston today, that memory might not have any relevance considering the fact that they are simply going to play a warm-up match where a team can even field all fifteen members. However, Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed said yesterday during an official press conference ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy that both teams would want to win.

"Over the past one-and-a-half years, Bangladesh have performed very well. The warm-up game is a good opportunity for both teams before the Champions Trophy. Both teams want to win so it's a good practice match to have. Over the past few years they've done well and we'll see its batsmen, like Tamim Iqbal, if we play in the semifinals," said Sarfraz.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza also stressed the significance of the match, saying it would be an important

step to adjusting with the conditions.

"The practice match tomorrow is important. We played in Ireland and the conditions and weather seem totally different after coming here. So we have to adjust through these two [practice] matches so we can be ready before the important matches arrive," said Mashrafe during a press conference yesterday.

The Bangladesh skipper rated his opponents highly, saying they would be one of the contenders for the trophy.

"You never know. If you go by the history of Pakistan they are always a big side. In this sort of tournament the big sides are always under pressure. My gut feeling is that they are a very good side and they can destroy any team. So yes they have a very good chance in this tournament," he opined.

Bangladesh had a good tri-series in Ireland where most of the batsmen got runs and the bowlers did decent job, but ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was off-colour with the bat and he may take the chance in the warm-up game to get back among runs.

The Tigers will play their second and final warm-up match against India on May 30 at the Kennington Oval, where they will also play their first group match against England on June 1.

Khulna get a Titan

SPorts Reporter

Former Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene has been appointed as head coach of the Khulna Titans.

Jayawardene, who represented Dhaka Dynamites in the 2016 Bangladesh Premier League, has been signed on a two-year deal.

This will be the Sri Lankan's second coaching job. He had a very successful stint with the Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League, leading the side to their third title earlier this month. He has also worked as a batting consultant for the England cricket team.

"I enjoyed playing in the BPL last year and that has given me great insight into what will be required to be successful in the tournament," Jayawardene said.

"The BPL is an exciting tournament for Bangladesh, as well as the region as a whole, and I am excited to be partnering with one of the most respected and forward-thinking franchises in the league," the former Sri Lanka captain added.

Tamim, Sabbir in Afg T20 league

SPorts Reporter

Bangladesh players Tamim Iqbal, Sabbir Rahman and Imrul Kayes were bought at an auction for the fourth edition of Afghanistan's franchise-based Twenty20 league, the Shpageeza Cricket League, yesterday.

Opener Tamim Iqbal fetched Afn 21,00,000 (approximately 25,00,000 taka) from Muslimyar Speenagar Tigers while Sabbir Rahman and Imrul Kayes were bought for Afn 7 lakh each (~ 8,27,000 taka) by GP Kabul Eagles and Arif Azeem BoostDefenders respectively.

The competition, featuring six teams, is scheduled to be played at Kabul International Cricket Stadium from July 18 to 28 and has been given the green light by the ICC.

'Looking for the perfect yorker'

Sports Reporter



Mustafizur Rahman showed signs of returning to his old form during the recently-concluded tri-series in Ireland, which brought huge relief to the team management ahead of the Tigers' ICC Champions Trophy campaign. The 21-year-old left-arm pacer was similarly happy with his form in the tri-series, but said that he was looking to make his yorkers even more effective.

"I am happy with the way things went in the tri-series. It was bad luck that we did not get the opportunity to bowl in the first match due to rain, but



I am happy with the performance in the other three matches. I enjoyed bowling," Mustafizur told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

Captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza also expressed satisfaction over Mustafizur's comeback and said during a press

conference that he hoped the young pacer would play a big role in the Champions Trophy for his side, while Tamim Iqbal pointed to the left-arter's return to form as a big plus point for the Tigers ahead of the tournament.

"Everything was okay. I almost got back my bowling rhythm and there are no complaints. The only issue which I will need to fix is my yorkers. I was unable to make them effective and this is an area I am looking forward to improving and I hope it will be okay very soon," Mustafizur added.

Mustafizur claimed seven wickets in three matches, but it was not only the number of wickets, but also the effectiveness that he showed which was encouraging.

Stokes fit to play Second ODI against SA today

AFP, Southampton



England's Ben Stokes has been passed fit to play in the second one-day international against South Africa, a team spokesman said Friday.

The star all-rounder had scans on his left knee after briefly leaving the field during England's 72-run win over the Proteas at Headingley on Wednesday, a result that put England 1-0 up in the three-match series.

Although the scans were inconclusive, Stokes still took a limited part in England's practice session on Friday at the Ageas Bowl, the headquarters of south coast club Hampshire and the venue for Saturday's second ODI.

However, an England and Wales Cricket Board spokesman said pacer Stokes was "fit to play and is available to bowl" as England seek to wrap up the series against the Proteas, the world's top-ranked ODI side, with a match to spare ahead of Monday's encounter at Lord's.

Stokes bowled just two overs before suffering pain in his left knee as the hosts enjoyed a confidence-boosting 72-run win in Leeds just a week out from the Champions Trophy tournament in England and Wales featuring cricket's leading eight ODI nations.

It was a concerning sight given he had surgery on the same knee last year.

Stokes, in his first England match since his most valuable player-winning stint in the lucrative Indian Premier League competition, came back on later Wednesday but did not bowl again.

During Friday's training session, Stokes had two long net sessions as a batsman but then, either side of adjusting the strapping on his knee, bowled just 12 deliveries in the edge of the square.

But as Wednesday's match demonstrated, England can win well without a major contribution from Stokes, a point emphasised by fast bowler Liam Plunkett.

"If it was up to him, he just wants to play every game," Plunkett told Sky Sports News on Friday.

"If you didn't have him in any team, you'd be disappointed," the Yorkshire quick added. "He's a massive player who can win games with bat, ball and in the field."

"But we've also got other players who can come in and win games -- as we've shown."

CAPTAINS HAVE THEIR SAY



'NOTHING TO LOSE'

We have nothing to lose. We just want to play our natural game. We have just played a very good series in the West Indies. We are very hopeful of playing well in this tournament and we want to win it.

We don't see us as having a surprise element, we want to come here and play free cricket, starting against India. We are taking matches

one by one and the Pakistan team is hopeful of building some confidence starting in the warm-up matches.

We have a better record against India in the Champions Trophy, not in other competitions, but we do well in this. We're looking to maintain that against them and it's very exciting.

--Sarfraz Ahmed (Pakistan)

'ALL ABOUT EXECUTION'

This year the team is a lot fitter, the cricketers are a lot more mature because that was a very young group four years ago. In the past four years they have gained a lot of experience. We are in a good head-space going into this tournament. I love the tournament because it represents a challenge from the word go. In the World Cup

you have a league and a lot of games to play but here it is group games and then either the semis or you are out.

You might have the best side in the world but if you do not execute there is no point having that skill. In a tournament like this it all boils down to how you execute on the day.

--Virat Kohli (India)



'NO ROOM FOR ERROR'

There are a number of guys getting cricket and preparation for this tournament. It counts for something but not for everything because we still come back to one-off clashes with opponents and if you win then you can go a long way in the competition. But there is not much time for slip-ups or conservative cricket.

Any time you have those experiences against



opponents you are coming up against in similar conditions it is only a good thing. But you don't tend to look too much into it in tournaments like this -- it is a one-off game and both teams will be playing with freedom and hope it comes off. On any given day things can happen that are beyond your control.

--Kane Williamson (New Zealand)

'HAPPY TO BE UNDERDOGS'

All the teams are quite even, I think in the past few months we have had a few lapses here and there. Nobody will give us a chance, to be really honest, but we are happy to enter the tournament as underdogs.

We are confident, we have prepared extremely well. Everyone has got a chance, no one can write anyone off and I'm sure it will be a very exciting

tournament. Anyone can change a game at any given stage. We look forward to utilising [Lasith] Malinga. He's very keen to get on the park. He hasn't played 50-over games in the recent past but he has played a lot of games in the IPL which is very intense.

--Angelo Mathews (Sri Lanka)



The Bangladesh team engage in some net practice in Birmingham yesterday in preparation for today's Champions Trophy warm-up match against Pakistan.

PHOTO: BCB

Senior Div Football Committee set up to look into fixing

Sports Reporter

The Dhaka Metropolitan Football League Committee (DMFLC) formed a three-member probe committee on Thursday to look into allegations of match-fixing in a Senior Division Football League match between Dhaka United Club and Friends Social Welfare Organisation.

The decision was made at the DMFLC meeting chaired by chairman Harunur Rashid. The probe committee, headed by National Sports Council's sports director Deel Mohammad, has been asked to submit its findings within a week.

Badda Jagarani Sangsad formally complained to the DMFLC that Dhaka United Club had intentionally lost their match against Friends Social Welfare Organisation to help the latter avoid relegation. Consequently, Badda JS finished bottom of the league and were demoted to the second division.

"The committee will interview the concerned players, club officials, referees and league officials who were assigned to the match on that day," Rashid said. "After investigating all that, the committee will give their opinion in line with the bylaws of the league."

However, Rashid added that if the relevant punishment was not found within the bylaws, then the report would be forwarded to the executive committee of Bangladesh Football Federation, who would then take punitive measures.