



Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood took three wickets from his last four deliveries, and six overall, as Australia restricted New Zealand to 291 all out in a rain-shortened innings after Kane Williamson's (INSET) century threatened a much bigger score in their Champions Trophy Group A game at Edgbaston yesterday. Australia started poorly in chase of a revised target of 235 in 33 overs and found themselves three down for 53, before rain came to their rescue.

PHOTOS: REUTERS



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SPORTS REPORTER

The indomitable Nasir Hossain took Gazi Group Cricketers inches from the Dhaka Premier League title as his all-round performance in yesterday's Super League clash shot Abahani out of the title race. Nasir scored a half-century after a three-wicket haul as Gazi Group regained the lead with a six-wicket victory against Abahani at BKSP yesterday.

Gazi increased their tally to 24 points while Abahani stayed on 22 but as they lost both first-phase and Super League matches against the current leaders, it will not help the holders if they win the last match and Gazi lose theirs. Only Prime Doleshwar can challenge Gazi. With 20 points, Prime Doleshwar will play the penultimate round against Mohammedan today at Fatullah and a win will keep them alive till their last match against Gazi on June 5; a Doleshwar loss will hand Gazi the title with one match in hand. If prime Doleshwar win their remaining two games then the net run-rates will come into consideration as Gazi won their first-phase match.

The source of Gazi Group's continued success, however, remained the same – the performance of Nasir as the batsman remained not out yesterday for the sixth occasion out of the last seven innings to maintain a season batting average of 477 and, most importantly, enabled Gazi to recover from a sudden slide only after the all-rounder joined the team upon returning from Ireland.

"Everybody can learn from him about how one should bat considering the circumstances. You know, I am searching for an answer; how is it possible that Nasir didn't

get a permanent place in the national team," said Gazi coach Mohammad Salahuddin.

Gazi Group's spinners justified their decision to bowl first as off-spinners Mahedi Hasan and Nasir claimed three wickets each after left-arm pacer Abu Hider trapped Saif Hassan in front in the first over of the game and Hossain Ali cleaned up Shadman Islam in the very next over. Abahani were bundled out for 156.

Among the Abahani batsmen, Mohammad Mithun, Liton Das, Afif Hossain and Shuvagata Hom got starts but failed to carry on.

In reply, Gazi Group were struggling at 84 for four by the 21st over but Nasir led from the front with a 92-ball 56 and put on a 73-run unbeaten fifth-wicket partnership with Nadir Chowdhury (26) to take his team home.

In another BKSP venue, Mehedi Maruf slammed 127 as Prime Bank defeated Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club by five wickets.

Opener Maruf hit 127 off 143 balls with 10 fours and four sixes as Prime Bank reached to 243 for five in reply to Jamal's 242.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ABAHANI: 156-10 in 41.2 overs (Afif 32, Liton 30, Mithun 28; Mehedi 3-30, Nasir 3-36, Hider 2-24)

GAZI GROUP: 157-4 on 36.4 overs (Nasir 56 not out, Anamul 41, Nadir 26 not out; Manan 2-40)

Result: Gazi Group Cricketers won by 6 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Nasir Hossain

SK. JAMAL: 242-7 in 50 overs (Sunny 58, Tanvir 57, Al Mamun 32; Al Amin Hossain 3-46, Taibur 2-39)

PRIME BANK: 243-5 in 48 overs (Maruf 127, Zakir 49, Afif 26)

Result: Prime Bank Cricket Club won by 5 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Mehedi Maruf.

Gazi eye summit as Nasir stars again

Title may be decided today through Mohammedan-Doleshwar match



SA hope to continue SL dominance

AFP, London



South Africa begin their Champions Trophy challenge at the Oval on Saturday by taking on a Sri Lanka side against whom they have already enjoyed overwhelming one-day international success this year.

The Proteas whitewashed Sri Lanka 5-0 in a bilateral series in South Africa in January.

Sri Lanka were not alone in being a touring side routed in 50-over cricket by South Africa, with the Proteas previously also hammering Australia 5-0.

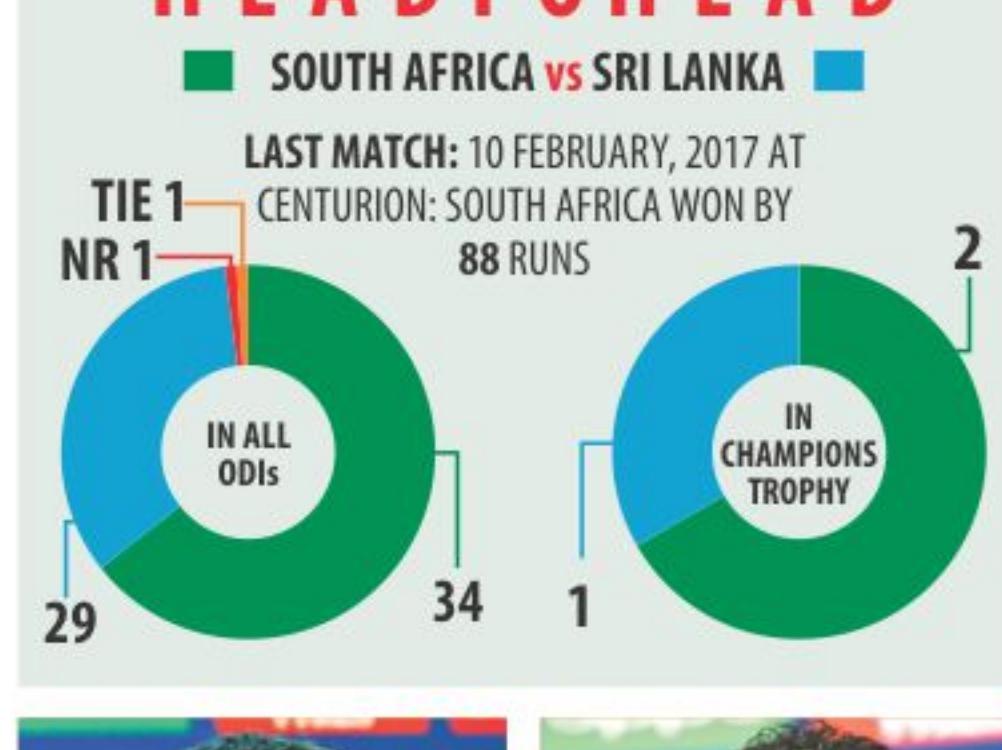
Yet for all they are top of the one-day international rankings, South Africa have a reputation for under-performing in International Cricket Council tournaments.

The only ICC event they have won was the inaugural Champions Trophy in 1998.

South Africa also boast the world's number one-ranked ODI batsman and bowler in AB de Villiers and Kagiso Rabada respectively.

In all they have four batsmen and two bowlers in the respective top 10 ICC rankings, while seventh-placed Sri Lanka have none in either list.

"We're still ranked the No 1 team in the



world going into the tournament, so there are quite a few reasons for us to be confident," said South Africa ODI captain de Villiers, whose side were beaten 2-1 away to Champions Trophy hosts England in a preceding three-match warm-up series.

"But we're still humble at the same time and know that we have to work hard and take it one step at a time to win this," he added.

Sri Lanka head into the tournament as underdogs and one of the key reasons they've struggled in recent months has been the absence of fast bowler Lasith Malinga, who hasn't

played any ODI cricket since November 2015 due to a knee injury.

The return of Malinga, whose unorthodox, slingshot action makes him one of the most difficult bowlers to face in world cricket, would be a massive boost for Sri Lanka.

"He has been our leading bowler for many years and we missed him," said captain Angelo Mathews.

"He is very keen to return to ODI cricket and we are looking forward to him performing again."

There are also question marks about all-rounder Mathews's availability for the South Africa match after scans revealed he'd suffered a calf strain.

He didn't play in Sri Lanka's warm-up game against New Zealand and will go through a fitness test on Friday.

Sri Lanka's form ahead of the competition has been mediocre, given they have lost warm-up games to Australia, New Zealand and even Scotland.

They believe batting against spin bowling is South Africa's weakness, however, and will look up to left-arm wrist spinner Lakshan Sandakan to give them the edge.

The 25-year-old has played only six ODIs and the Sri Lankans believe his variety will trouble their opponents.

Sri Lanka arrived in England well in advance of the Champions Trophy to acclimatize to the conditions and conducted a week long residential camp in Kent.

Now they will hope that work pays dividends at the Oval, the south London headquarters of Surrey -- a county for whom retired Sri Lanka great Kumar Sangakkara has been in prolific form this season, with five successive first-class hundreds.

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