

Tigers eager to pounce

AL-AMIN from Cardiff



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said that they are very excited ahead of their final group game against New Zealand at the Sophia Gardens in Cardiff today.

"The atmosphere in the dressing room is vibrant. Everyone wants to win this game. We know it won't be easy but if we can do well as a unit which has been our strength we have a chance of a positive result," Mashrafe told reporters yesterday.

This is also a game in which Bangladesh can fancy their chances of progressing into the semifinals of the ICC Champions Trophy provided that they beat the Black Caps and England do them a favour by defeating Australia the next day.

But the Bangladesh captain, who is the lone survivor of the team that famously won against Australia at this very ground 12 years ago, said that he was not interested in thinking of a semifinal berth.

"We want to finish this game on a high which will be an achievement in itself and let's see what happens next. When we came here we knew we are in a very difficult group. We may not have been at our best in the last two games. We have committed a few mistakes but I don't think we were disappointing against England and Australia," said the inspirational Bangladesh captain, adding that they were lucky to escape with a point against the Aussies, but that they are ready to make it count.

He said that Bangladesh are not a team that frequently score 300 runs.

"It's a habit we are still not used to. We have scored 305 against England. But we are now aware that we missed the chance to score another 30 runs which could have been crucial. Against Australia we scored 182 but we were a bit unlucky to lose Shakib [Al Hasan] at a crucial time. Had he been there we could have scored 250-plus; that



could have been a fighting total," Mashrafe retorted when asked whether his team had failed to perform as a unit.

He said that everyone was fit enough to play, including opener Tamim, who bruised his right rib while batting against Australia.

The Bangladesh captain observed that the conditions are not certainly ideal for the Tigers and that they suit teams like New Zealand. But he was confident that if they get an opportunity this time they are not going to waste it like they did on the tour of New Zealand at the turn of the year.

"We created chances in New Zealand but we could not grab them. But this time if we get a chance we will give everything to grab it. We will have to play hard," said the pace bowler when talking about a tour of New Zealand where Bangladesh failed to win a single match across formats.

An apologetic Mashrafe said that he was a bit late coming to the press briefing as he was having a good look at the wicket.

"The wicket looks good. There is a bit of grass and they (grounds man) are cutting it. Still, we will have to look at the wicket tomorrow morning to make our decision. But whatever it is we will be positive and definitely we will play with five bowlers," he said.

When asked how it felt being the lone survivor of the famous victory against Australia at this ground in 2005, he said: "It was 11 years back. The whole stadium has changed and it is hard to recognise it since it has gone through a lot of development."

He also said that Bangladesh's batting is not just about Tamim.

"He is playing fantastic cricket. But we have the firepower in the middle. Mushfiqur [Rahim] scored against England, Shakib got a start against Australia, Mahmudullah [Riyad] was in good form in Ireland. So, if they come to the party we can even win from a disadvantageous position," the captain said, adding that the rain stayed away today.

HEAD TO HEAD

BANGLADESH vs NEW ZEALAND

LAST MEETING

24 May 2017 in Dublin; Bangladesh won by 5 wickets

IN CHAMPIONS TROPHY

9

21

1

With Tamim Iqbal in the form of his life, Bangladesh's other top-order batsmen such as Mushfiqur Rahim will need to step up in their crucial final Champions Trophy Group A game against New Zealand in Cardiff today.

PHOTO: BCB



Conditions in our favour: Boult

STAR SPORT DESK



While much of the discussion in this region has been about Bangladesh beating New Zealand today and hopefully getting a positive result in the Australia-England clash the following day, Black Caps pacer Trent Boult made it clear that his side had no intention of exiting from the group stage of the Champions Trophy.

Both the Kiwis and Bangladesh have suffered defeat at the hands of England, while their games against Australia were washed out, and Boult stressed the importance of the match at the pre-match press briefing. He also hoped that the seaming conditions expected on English pitches would help them.

"I guess it [the conditions] is a bit of an advantage, but I'm sure the Bangladeshis have done their homework, and no doubt would have watched what went down the other

day. But yeah, new surface, it's going to be interesting to see if it plays anything like the other one did," he said, referring to his side's previous match against England at the same venue.

Apart from Tamim Iqbal, Bangladesh's top order have been a bundle of nerves in the tournament so far and the 27-year-old spoke about the importance of getting wickets early and attacking the top-order in order to keep the pressure on.

"I think we all know the importance of getting wickets early in the innings and putting the team under pressure is where you can really set the game up for people. That's the challenge tomorrow. I'm sure we'd love to come hard at the top order, which has been playing very well. But if we can do that, I'm sure we can set up a decent total to chase down or obviously set."

Boult refused to label the Kiwis favourites in the match, speaking about the match in last month's tri-series in Ireland, when Bangladesh

defeated New Zealand by five wickets.

"Bangladesh are a quality side. In the tri-series last month we had a few players that weren't involved but they are a quality side. We know they are going to come hard. It's a must-win game, so it's going to be an exciting challenge. Once again, their batsmen have been making runs. I think Tamim [Iqbal] at the top of the order is a quality player."

Perhaps because he mentioned Tamim, Boult was asked if there was any wicket that he was particularly keen on getting, but the New Zealander opted not to single anyone out, saying the 'stacked' top order would be a priority.

He also vented his frustration at the rain.

"Frustrating? Yeah, I guess no players want to miss out. They want to contribute to the team and get as many runs as they can. But we're stacked with some quality, experienced players who can make runs, so it's always a good thing to have."

Sarfraz hails 'home' crowd after SA win

AFP, Birmingham

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed said playing in front of a 'home' crowd had helped inspire his side to a 19-run win over top-ranked ODI side South Africa in the Champions Trophy at Edgbaston on Wednesday.

Pakistan fans dominated a crowd of more than 16,000, giving it the air of a home game for Sarfraz's men in Birmingham, a city with one of the largest Asian populations in Britain.

"That is a feeling we miss, not playing in Pakistan," said Sarfraz.

"Maybe that was a difference, the crowd was supporting us and that's why the players were boosted."



With an average of almost 50 against the Tigers, Kane Williamson will be the prized scalp going into tomorrow's potentially decisive Champions Trophy encounter.

SL stun holders with epic chase

AFP, London



Sri Lanka staged a superb run chase to stun India and keep alive their Champions Trophy challenge as Kusal Mendis inspired a famous seven-wicket victory over the holders on Thursday.

Needing 322 to avoid a second successive Group B defeat, Sri Lanka powered to a memorable triumph at The Oval thanks to key contributions from Mendis (89), Danushka Gunathilaka (76) and captain Angelo Mathews (52).

Mathews admitted earlier this week that many experts expected his underdogs to be thrashed by in-form India.

But Sri Lanka defied the odds to win with eight balls to spare and they can qualify for the semi-finals if they beat Pakistan in their final group match in Cardiff on June 12.

After losing by 99 runs against South Africa in their opener, that would be a remarkable turnaround for a young Sri Lanka team in the midst of a major rebuilding project.

India's failure to secure a second consecutive win after thumping arch rivals Pakistan was a major surprise and they must beat South Africa at The Oval on Sunday to avoid a humiliating exit.

Shikhar Dhawan's 125 had put India in a strong position as the holders piled up 321 for six.

The 31-year-old hit 15 fours and one six in his 128-ball innings, receiving strong support from Rohit Sharma and MS Dhoni, but it wasn't enough.

India had only themselves to blame after squandering the momentum given to them by Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who dismissed Niroshan Dickwella for seven when the opener's edge was caught by Ravindra Jadeja.

Needing what would be a record run chase in ODIs staged at The Oval,

Gunathilaka set about giving Sri Lanka hope.

He hit Umesh Yadav for a sky-scraping six and, together with the aggressive Mendis, imposed himself well enough to build a quick-fire 50 partnership.

Hardik Pandya had a chance to remove Mendis with the score on 70-1, but young all-rounder dropped a chance off his own bowling.

If complacency was an issue for India's wayward bowlers, Gunathilaka made them pay, reaching his half-century in emphatic style with another six.

By the time Sri Lanka reached 108-1 in the 20th over, the holders were beginning to worry.

When Mendis hit three successive boundaries, their partnership was up

to 159 and India were in danger of letting the match slip from their grasp.

But Gunathilaka's career-best ODI innings came to an end when he was run out by Umesh Yadav after rashly trying to turn a single into two.

Incredibly, Sri Lanka didn't learn from that mistake and Mendis persisted in the same fashion, easily run out by Kumar's direct hit while attempting to steal a single.

Crucially, Mathews came in to steady the ship with a nerveless innings.



Fit-again Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews played a captain's knock against India, powering his side to a seven-wicket win in chase of 321 with an unbeaten 52 off 45 balls.

PHOTO: REUTERS

A shuffle on the cards

SPORTS REPORTER from Sophia Gardens



It was half-past three in Cardiff yesterday and it was raining heavily. The pitch was covered and the Bangladesh coach, who had a discussion with the curator of the ground, left the ground with his charges after a half-baked evening training session. The rain and the overcast conditions along with some grass on the wicket have certainly put the coach and the captain in a situation to go for a change in the line-up that played against Australia at The Oval on June 5.

Although they will make the final decision after having a look at the wicket today,

it was quite evident that a couple of changes were in the making. There is a strong possibility for Imrul Kayes, who batted at number three, to sit out the game. In that event Mosaddeq Hossain will return to the playing eleven and bat down the order. In that event Sabbir Rahim will return to his usual batting position at number three.

And you still cannot rule out the possibility of the introduction of a fourth seamer. If that happens, Taskin Ahmed will make his Champions Trophy debut, pushing off-spinner Mehedi Hasan to the reserve bench. And if these changes are made it will be the third combination in as many games for the Tigers.

IND-SL SCOREBOARD					
INDIA		R/B		45/65	
Sharma	c Perera	b Malinga	78/79	6/3	
Dhawan	c Mendis	b Malinga	125/128	15/1	
Kohli	c Dickwella	b Pradeep	0/5	0/0	
Yuvraj	c Gunaratne	7/18	0/0		
Dhoni	c Chandimal	b Perera	63/52	7/2	
Pandya	c Perera	b Lakmal	9/5	0/1	
Jadhav	not out		25/13	3/1	
Jadeja	not out		0/0	0/0	
Extras	(lb-4, w-10)		14		
Total:	(For 6 wickets in 50 overs)		321		
Did not bat:	B Kumar, UYT Yadav, JI Bumrah				
Fall of wickets:	1-138, 2-139, 3-179, 4-261, 5-278, 6-307				
BOWLER	O	M	R	W	
Malinga	10	0	70	2	
Lakmal	10	1	72	1	
Pradeep	10	0	73	1	
Perera	9	0	54	1	
Gunathilaka	8	0	41	0	
Gunaratne	3	0	7	1	
SRI LANKA	R/B	45/65			
Dickwella	c Jadeja	b Kumar	7/18	0/0	
Gunathilaka	run out		76/72	7/2	
Mendis	run out		89/93	11/1	
Perera	retired hurt		47/44	5/0	
Mathews	not out		52/45	6/0	
Gunaratne	not out		34/21	2/2	
Extras	(lb-11, w-5, nb-1)		17		
Total:	(For 3 wickets in 48.4 overs)		322		
Did not bat:	Chandimal, Perera, Lakmal, Malinga, Pradeep				
Fall of wickets:	1-11, 2-170, 3-196, 3-271				
BOWLER	O	M	R	W	
Kumar	10	0	54	1	
Yadav	9.4	0	67	0	
Bumrah	10	0	52	0	
Pandya	7	1	51	0	
Jadeja					