

SPORT



Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed sprints towards the dressing room after his unbeaten 61 rescued the team and took them past Sri Lanka's total in their Champions Trophy Group B match at the Sophia Gardens in Cardiff yesterday. The win confirms Pakistan's place in the first semifinal against England on June 14, while Bangladesh will take on India in the second semifinal the following day. PHOTO: REUTERS

Cricket craze set to descend

AL-AMIN from Birmingham



When this reporter was walking down Suffolk Street in Birmingham, a gentleman in his 40s was kind enough to show him the way to the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Broad Street. While having a conversation during the 10-minute walk he became enthusiastic when he understood that I was here for cricket.

He instantly showed a photo on his mobile where his father and he were standing with Indian all-rounder Yuvraj Singh. A member of a family of dentists, Robson said that his father travelled all the way to India to attend Yuvraj's wedding last year.

He is however not a keen follower of cricket, but his understanding is that the game is as popular in Bangladesh and India as the English Premier League football in England. He is also well aware of the fact that come next Thursday, the city will be abuzz with India and Bangladesh fans for the key Champions Trophy semifinal.

He parted ways once we reached the entrance of the imposing hotel where both Bangladesh and Indian players were residing. It was business as usual in the afternoon and the Bangladesh players looked very relaxed as some headed for shopping and some returned after doing a gym session at Edgesbaston, where Bangladesh will play their biggest game in an ICC flagship tournament in three days' time.

It was an optional day for practice and only the bowlers turned up to have some fitness drills at the ground. When left-arm pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman returned to the hotel he was invited to have a few words with the waiting Bangladesh press.

Fizz has never been someone whom you will enjoy talking with. He said a few things this time around but those were more conventional other than serious insights into his thoughts.

His only concern was that his cutters were not as effective here as they were in home condition. But this is something he will certainly overcome because he has got a shrewd cricket brain that can read the batsmen very well.

Understandably, expectations are very high as he was the wrecker-in-chief when Bangladesh won the home series against India 2-1 in 2015. But it would be unwise to put him under any sort of pressure in conditions where he is still learning.

It is a good thing that the Bangladesh players are not as excited as their millions of followers, who have been in an intense, and often bitter, emotional attachment ever since Bangladesh's World Cup quarterfinal against India at the MCG in 2015.

Bangladesh's heart-breaking defeat against India at the R Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore during the T20 World Cup gave the otherwise one-sided battle a bit of a tasty feeling. It has however often assumed outside proportions off the field, leading to an unhealthy battle in social media. And whether you like it or not, this overflowing emotion is set to take centre-stage leading up to the second semifinal of the tournament.

At the moment it looks like the Indians will outnumber their next-door neighbours in the stands on Thursday, and their cricketing heroes may well run away with a victory against an improving yet not-quite-up-there Tigers. The biggest advantage for Bangladesh however will be that they will start as underdogs, which they have been throughout the tournament so far.

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SL-PAK SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA	R/B	4s/6s
Dickwella c Sarfraz b Amir	73/86	4/0
Gunathilaka c Malik b Junaid	13/20	2/0
Mendis b Hasan	27/29	4/0
Chandimal b Ashraf	0/2	0/0
Mathews b Amir	39/54	2/1
De Silva c Sarfraz b Junaid	1/6	0/0
Gunaratne c Zaman b Hasan	27/44	1/0
Perera c Azam b Junaid	1/5	0/0
Lakmal b Hasan	26/34	3/0
Malinga not out	9/14	0/0
Pradeep c b Ashraf	1/3	0/0
Extras: (b-1, lb-5, w-12, nb-1)	19	
Total: (All out in 49.2 overs)	236	
Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-82, 3-83, 4-161, 5-162, 6-162, 7-167, 8-213, 9-232, 10-236.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Amir	10	0	53	2
Junaid	10	3	40	3
Wasim	8	1	33	0
Ashraf	6.2	0	37	2
Hasan	10	0	43	3
Hafeez	5	0	24	0

PAKISTAN:	R/B	4/6
Azhar c Mendis b Lakmal	34/50	2/1
Fakhar c Gunaratne b Pradeep	50/36	8/1
Babar c De Silva b Pradeep	10/18	1/0
Shoaib c Dickwella b Malinga	11/20	1/0
Sarfraz not out	61/79	5/0
Imad c Dickwell b Pradeep	4/3	1/0
Fahim run out	15/15	1/1
Amir not out	28/43	1/0
Extras: (b-4, w-13, lb-6)	23	
Total: (for 7 wickets in 44.5 overs)	237	
FOW: 74/1, 92/2, 95/3, 110/4, 131/5, 137/6, 162/7		

Bowling	O	M	R	W
Malinga	9.5	2	52	1
Lakmal	10	0	48	1
Pradeep	10	0	60	3
Perera	8	0	43	1
Gunaratne	5	0	19	0
Gunathilaka	1	0	2	0

Kohli's brutal honesty helped India

AFP, London



Virat Kohli says India's Champions Trophy demolition of South Africa was fuelled by his refusal to spare his players from criticism.

Kohli's side crushed South Africa by eight wickets at The Oval in their final Group B fixture to set up a likely semifinal showdown with Bangladesh on Thursday.

India had to win to avoid elimination after slumping to a shock loss against Sri Lanka, a spluttering performance that prompted Kohli to let his team know where they were going wrong.

Rather than sugar-coat his comments to save his players' pride, the India captain made it clear they had to improve and he was delighted with how they responded in the make or break clash on Sunday.

"You have to be honest. You have to sometimes say things that hurt. That's what I believe in," he said.

"You have to lay it out in front of them that this is what we did wrong, including me, and we need to take it on the chin and accept it and prove it.

"That's why we are chosen among millions of people to play at this level. You have to be good enough to do that for the country and you have to be good enough to bounce

back, as well.

"You can't do the same mistakes over and over again. That sort of mindset is really helping all of us to come together as a unit and make things happen.

"It's not about asking two, three players to do it. We are asking everyone to do it and everyone is responding really well.

"Until you have a team effort, you cannot win games, especially in conditions that you are not familiar with. Today was a team performance."

With India and Bangladesh joining hosts England in the last four and the winner of Monday's Sri Lanka against Pakistan match taking the final semifinal berth, it's been a strong tournament for the teams from the sub continent.

Kohli acknowledged the amount of one-day cricket played in the region was a factor, but he has also been impressed with the way India have adapted to the English conditions.

"Maybe because of how much limited-overs cricket we play, I think the players are getting more experienced in difficult situations," he said.

"Maybe some of the teams have really surprised the opposition with the way they have batted and bowled in certain situations."

South Africa captain AB De Villiers was one of three players run out as his side collapsed to 191 all out.

Fizz's on-field guile continues with media

SPORTS REPORTER



A big Bangladeshi media contingent has been following the Tigers in England. Generally the interest is high with any news relating to the Bangladesh cricket team and even more curiosity was generated after the team reached the semifinals of the Champions Trophy, a rare achievement for the country. There is high demand to hear the Tigers speak in detail ahead of their semifinal clash against India on June 15 at Edgbaston and it was the turn of pacer Mustafizur Rahman yesterday.

Nothing can be better than hearing something from a young star like Mustafizur, especially when the left-arm pacer had a dream debut against India at home. But as usual the reporters had to struggle for some sentences from the less-than-five-minute interaction, where the Fizz shortened his answer as much as possible while even ducking some questions. It's always nice for the reporters to see his innocent smile, but the replies can be quite troublesome.

The most important thing he said to the inquisitive reporters was that: "There is no end to improving. My cutters are more effective back home. It is not working that well here, but I am still trying."

"We have reached the semifinals....the players, each



from their own position, have done well. With a semifinal against India in the offing, everyone is in high spirits. I hope that something good will happen," he responded to the question about their semifinal opponents.

On his personal hopes against India, he said: "I always try to execute what I am thinking about. Not much, I try to give my best in bowling."

Replying to a question about whether the pace attack will have a good impact, he said: "We always believe. If everyone has a good day, then I hope something good will happen."

"Those who come, come because they want to see the national team play and because they love us. We try to honour them and repay their love and respect, and also of those back home," he said when asked how welcome the adoring expats in England have made him feel.

Questions continued from the reporters but the young pacer left the scene with a smile.

Tigers Inside ANWAR ISPAT

T20 SERIES AGAINST SA England call up uncapped quintet

AFP, London

England called up uncapped quintet Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Tom Curran, Mason Crane and Craig Overton on Monday for their three-match Twenty20 series against South Africa.

The five, who have no international appearances between them in any format, are given their chance as several key players including Test captain Joe Root and star all-rounder Ben Stokes have been rested.

Those two, alongside several other established players, will instead take part in day/night county championship matches ahead of the first Test against West Indies at Edgbaston, which will be played under similar conditions -- a first in England.

The squad -- captained by Eoin Morgan -- will get together on June 20 with their first match in Southampton on June 21.

'Just want to get thru' the hurt' Smith helps Stokes find backside

PTI, London



He does not know why South Africa continue to choke in big events, but a defiant AB De Villiers insisted that he wants to stay on as captain and take the Proteas to the World Cup triumph in 2019.

South Africa were knocked out of the Champions Trophy after suffering a crushing eight-wicket defeat against title holders India in a must-win match.

The Proteas lived up to their 'perennial chokers' tag in a virtual quarter-final clash that turned out to be a thoroughly one-sided affair.

When asked by a senior South African scribe as to why he still wants to be the captain, a sullen-faced De Villiers replied: "Because I am a good captain!"

"I can take this team forward. I can take us to win a World Cup, I believe. And I believed the same thing over here in this tournament and the last one, that's what I believe. I love doing it."

He still harbours the dream of playing the 2019 World Cup and firmly believes that the Proteas can win it.

"I must be very honest with you. Not a lot of people believe me but I feel it is pretty close (World Cup triumph)."

"I believe we are very close as a unit. There is more than enough talent, and we have just got to get it right when it matters most," an optimistic De Villiers said.

"We have tried quite a few things, camps and psychologists, whatever you want to call it. There has been quite a few game plans around that. In my mind, that was not the problem. It was not a mental thing. We just did not play well," the 33-year-old batsman reasoned.

It was the latest setback for South Africa in ICC tournaments as the Proteas have won only one knockout match in big events since 2000.

Asked whether a radical shake up is needed, De Villiers said, "That's a question can only be answered by people who are in control of making radical decisions. That's not my decision. So we will have to wait and see what people out there want to decide or whoever is in control of making those kind of decisions."

"I don't think we are a bad cricket team." That he is emotionally exhausted and became evident when asked about how his team would prepare for the next World Cup.

"I am not thinking about the next one now. We just sort of want to just get through this hurt now, because it is hurting quite bad. I have not thought about what we are going to think about our next tournament. That's probably the World Cup in two years' time, De Villiers said, sounding really low."

AFP, Birmingham



It may not have been the most profound piece of batting advice Steve Smith has ever given when he told Ben Stokes during the Indian Premier League that he was "losing his backside a bit".

But the Australia captain could have been forgiven for wondering why he'd said anything at all as England all-rounder Stokes's blistering unbeaten century condemned Smith's men to an early Champions Trophy exit at Edgbaston on Saturday.

Stokes played under Smith's captaincy for the Rising Pune Supergiant during this year's edition of the lucrative Twenty20 IPL franchise tournament.

Asked after Saturday's match what tip Smith had passed on, Stokes told reporters: "He just gave a little tip out in India, something on my technique, something that he felt he could help me with."

Pressed to reveal the nugget of information, Stokes added: "Just that I was losing my backside a bit when I was hitting."

Stokes certainly didn't 'lose' much at the crease either in the IPL or during Saturday's clash in Birmingham.

Paid a record \$2.16 million to play the eight-week IPL season, Stokes was instrumental to Pune reaching the knockout phase after a brilliant debut campaign.

The 26-year-old left-handed batsman and right-handed pace bowler scored 316 runs in 12 matches, with a highest of 103 not out, and took 12 wickets before a recall to England squad duty stopped him featuring in the play-offs.

There was nothing much wrong with Stokes's shot-making on Saturday either as he powered his way to a 108-ball century including 13 fours and two sixes -- his second hundred in three one-day international innings.

In a match they needed to win to join already qualified old foes England in the semifinals, Australia were held to a below par total of 277 for nine.

Even so they were right back in the game after reducing England to 35 for three only for Stokes, with an ODI best 102 not out, and skipper Eoin Morgan (87) to share a fourth-wicket stand of 159.