

SPORT

Tigers enjoying the pressure

AL-AMIN from Edgbaston

The sun was shining brightly over Edgbaston yesterday and the red and green Bangladesh flag was dancing along with the breeze blowing across the ground. The Tigers' bowlers were running in at full pace in pleasant weather and hitting the stumps more frequently than not.

They appeared relaxed ahead of their semifinal against defending champions India. And inspirational Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, while appearing at a press briefing, pointed out that the bowlers would have hard time bowling on this wicket.

"It is more like an Oval wicket. It might be a tough wicket for the bowlers. We will have to adjust ourselves with the wicket," said the Bangladesh captain.

"The players are very excited to play in the semifinal of this kind of tournament. But to me it's just another game. And if we can consider this game as just another match we will be able to play more freely."

He admitted that there was a lot of hype surrounding the semifinal but said that they were enjoying that instead of considering it additional pressure.

"If you want to improve you will have to face this sort of situation. You will also have to win these sorts of games if you want to go up the ladder. We definitely enjoy this kind of situation rather taking it as pressure."

After being confronted with the obvious question about whether he could play any role in stopping the unhealthy atmosphere on social media which started after the 2015 World Cup quarterfinal, the skipper said: "It is something beyond the control of the players. It is something we don't expect. At the end of the day it's just a game. But as far I'm concerned I have tried but I think it is not possible for me or



Bangladesh have already defied the odds to make it to the semifinal and they will be hoping to continue their run into the final when they take on India in the ICC Champions Trophy today. Tamim Iqbal (INSET) failed to get among the runs after two fantastic outings and he will be hoping to make amends. PHOTOS: BCB



the other captain to control this. So, it's better for us to focus on the game."

He also said that the players had forgotten what happened in that quarterfinal at the MCG, where a couple of umpiring decisions went against Bangladesh. He again ruled out this particular contest as a grudge match.

"No. It could have been England or it could have been anyone [in that quarterfinal]. We have forgotten what happened 24 months ago. We have played a lot of games against them after that -- in the Asia Cup, in the T20 World Cup and of course the home series that we have won. Tomorrow we will play a new match and obviously our focus will be on that game," said Mashrafe.

The Bangladesh captain also dismissed the notion that it would be Bangladesh's biggest game ever.

"I was answering the same question in 2015. We are playing in the semifinal this time and there is a lot of hype around this game. You can say it's a big game but I'm not sure."

He also thanked his Indian counterpart Virat Kohli for terming his team 'a dangerous opposition'.

"Thanks to Virat. On our day we can beat any team. We are a team that never gives up no matter what situation we are in," said the inspirational Bangladesh captain.

"I do not expect all 15 players in the team to perform equally in a tournament. Some will perform well and for some it won't go that well. And I'm against identifying any particular player. You also can't expect three or four players to perform in a particular game. They will have to think professionally. We will have to look at whether every player in the team is trying to give his best. It is also important for those who are performing to keep up their good work."

He said he was disappointed with the way they lost to India in the T20 World Cup last year.

"Obviously we were disappointed that we could not win the World T20 game against India with two runs needed off three balls and two of our best batsmen at the wicket. It happens in cricket. We are not going to make the same mistakes again."



ROAD TO SEMIFINAL

BANGLADESH: Group Stage Lost to England by 8 wickets No Result versus Australia Beat New Zealand by 5 wickets
INDIA: Group Stage Beat Pakistan by 124 runs (D/L method) Lost to Sri Lanka by 7 wickets

TRIVIA

- In the 2007 World Cup, Bangladesh knocked India out of the tournament in the group stage with a five-wicket win.
- In the 2015 edition, India repaid the favour as they KO'd Bangladesh with an 109-run quarterfinal win.
- The teams have faced off thrice in ICC events with India winning two matches and Bangladesh winning one.
- In their last 10 matches, Bangladesh have won three, while one was washed out.
- Taskin Ahmed has taken 12 wickets in five ODIs against India at an average of 13.08 -- his average against other teams is 32.16.
- Mustafizur Rahman has thirteen in three games at an average of 11.54, but he has taken more catches (3) than wickets (1) in the tournament so far.
- Yuvraj Singh will be playing his 300th ODI, becoming the fifth Indian to do so, in tomorrow's final. He debuted in the Champions Trophy in 2000.
- Since the 2015 World Cup, when Bangladesh's rise began, the Tigers have had a better ODI record against the top-



Nadal out of Queen's

AFP, London

Rafael Nadal confirmed Tuesday he has pulled out of next week's Aegon Championships at Queen's in order to rest and prepare for Wimbledon.

The 31-year-old Spaniard has had a hugely successful clay season, claiming a record 10th French Open crown on Sunday to earn a 15th Grand Slam title.

"I am very sorry to say that I am not going to be able to play Queen's next week," the world number two said on his Facebook page.

"I am sad to make this decision because I love Queen's, I won the tournament in 2008 and every time I reached the Wimbledon final it was after playing Queen's."

"I was hoping to take some days off and then be ready, but at 31, and after a long clay court season with all of the emotions of Roland Garros, and after speaking to my team and doctors, I have decided my body needs to rest if I am going to be ready to play Wimbledon."

Mamunul fined by Ctg Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Footballer Mamunul Islam has been fined Tk 5 lakh and given a warning on disciplinary grounds by his club Chittagong Abahani yesterday.

The decision was made at a meeting of the football committee of the club, which had served a show-cause notice to the Bangladesh national team captain asking him why he had returned to the team hotel at midnight the night before the final of Walton Federation Cup. The notice also asked him to give an explanation about his poor performance in that match which Chittagong Abahani lost 3-1 against Dhaka Abahani.

"Mamunul gave an answer within the allotted timeframe, but his answer did not seem to be satisfactory enough to the football committee chairman Tarafdar Ruhul Amin," said the club's football manager Arman Aziz after the meeting yesterday.

"Mamunul was given punishment to send a message to other players that the club management would not spare even the best player on disciplinary issues," said Arman adding that Tarafdar would sit with the players after the Eid-ul-Fitr break to explain to them how serious he is on issues of discipline.



Kohli promises top show

AGENCIES, Birmingham

India captain Virat Kohli warned his team not to underestimate Bangladesh, a team who have improved dramatically over the past few years to the point where they are now one game away from reaching a first final at an ICC event, and called for complete focus against their "dangerous" opponents.

"It's no surprise anymore to anyone that they are doing really well," Kohli said. "They are a very dangerous side on their day and everyone realises that ... Bangladesh have taken huge strides."

He also promised there would be no let-up from the title-holders when they face Bangladesh in the semifinals of the Champions Trophy at Edgbaston on Thursday.

After a surprise group defeat by Sri Lanka in a tournament featuring the world's top eight one-day international sides, India responded to their 'win or go home' clash against South Africa with a commanding eight-wicket victory over the top-ranked Proteas at the Oval last weekend.

India's bowlers put the brakes on South Africa's innings while a trio of run-outs said much about the Proteas' frailty and the improved fielding standards of Kohli's men.

Needing a mere 192 for victory, Kohli was there at the finish with 76 not out as India won with a whopping 12 overs to spare.

Now India return to Edgbaston where they launched their title-defence with a 124-run thrashing of arch-rivals Pakistan.

"We played in Birmingham before. We like that pitch. It suits our game," said Kohli after the win over South Africa. "There's no looking back. There's always room for improvement. We can't rest on your laurels."

Kohli acknowledged the amount of one-day cricket played in the region was a factor, but he has also been impressed with the way so many of the Asian nations have adapted to 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."

Kohli also shrugged off concerns about his team's lower-middle order.

India's top order were solid in group stage victories over Pakistan and South Africa, meaning the likes of Hardik Pandya, Kedar Jadhav and Ravindra Jadeja have not really been tested apart from during the defeat by Sri Lanka.

The trio did not bat against South Africa and Jadeja has not faced a ball in the tournament, leading to concerns about what might happen if the likes of Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, Kohli, Yuvraj Singh and Mahendra Singh Dhoni fail to fire.

"As a batsman you want to finish off games," Kohli told a news conference on Wednesday. "You are not necessarily going to get out thinking 'my middle order has not got enough game time'."

"We know Kedar and Hardik are playing really well at the moment so we are not bothered at all."

Kohli said India would field the same team that played South Africa.

Harun to take charge today

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahbub Harun was yesterday appointed as the head coach of the Bangladesh hockey team for the upcoming 10th Hockey Asia Cup, just two days after the release of German coach Oliver Kurtz.

Harun has been asked to take charge of the team, which is currently in camp for the Asia Cup, within today.

"After a discussion with the Bangladesh Hockey Federation president today [Wednesday], local coach Mahbub Harun has been given the responsibility to guide the national team in the upcoming Asia Cup," BHF general Abdus Sadeque said, adding that they are searching for a foreign coach as well.

Sadeque informed that Harun would join the ongoing training camp today [Thursday] and he will be assisted by the rest of the coaching staff for the tournament which is scheduled to be held in Dhaka in October.

Harun had worked as Kurtz's deputy during the Hockey World League Round-2 where Bangladesh lost against Oman to finish fifth among eight teams. The veteran coach, however, had a good record previously as he guided the national team to victory over China in 2013.