

SPORT

Tigers waste ideal chance

AL-AMIN from Edgbaston

When India captain Virat Kohli won the toss and opted to field it was a decision influenced by overcast conditions. And when the game started after a 10-minute delay due to a drizzle there was the expectation in the India camp that the new ball will do a bit.

Unfortunately, that was not the case. Although they took two early wickets -- opener Soumya Sarkar was bowled for a duck in the first over and Sabbir Rahman departed for 19 after promising a lot -- the momentum actually shifted Bangladesh's way in the form of a brilliant century partnership between Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim.

Soumya dragged a length delivery just outside his off-stump while trying to drive it through the off-side. Sabbir started aggressively -- hitting Bhuvneshwar Kumar for a couple of boundaries in the third over, but perished against the same bowler after hitting a wide delivery to Ravindra Jadeja at point.

Bangladesh might have lost two wickets for 31 runs but the wicket looked an absolute belter with Tamim and Mushfiqur crafting 123 runs for the third wicket. The way they were playing till the 28th over, it put the India captain under tremendous pressure.

After an eventful 13th over, Kohli was forced to change his line of attack, replacing his third seamer Hardik Pandya, who got a bit of a hammering, including a massive six by Tamim over mid-wicket, after the drinks break.

Tamim and Mushfiqur's partnership grew in confidence before it ended in the cruelest of fashions by an occasional off-break bowler, who could have been the easiest of targets for any set batsman. Tamim appeared a bit edgy after failing to dispatch a full toss for four in the 23rd over. The very next ball he tried to sweep, a shot he has hardly played in the recent past, and was clean bowled for a knock of 70 off 82 balls which contained seven fours and a six.

It was the breakthrough that India needed and a wicket that shifted the momentum from Bangladesh to the other side. Bangladesh lost their three key batsmen in quick succession. Shakib Al Hasan fell in the trap set around his off-stump. Jadeja fired one quicker just outside the left-hander's off-stump. With not many fielders behind square it was too tempting for Shakib to resist the cut, and he got a



Tamim Iqbal (L) and Mushfiqur Rahim put on a brilliant third-wicket stand of 123 runs to put Bangladesh in a promising position. However, both batsmen got out to poor shots at the worst possible time, handing the momentum to India, which (Inset) skipper Virat Kohli gleefully grasped.



PHOTOS: REUTERS/BCB



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Tigers Inside ANWAR ISPAT REPORT ISPAT INSIDE

thick edge and wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni does not miss those chances.

But Mushfiqur's was the most shocking dismissal. After the departure of Shakib, it was expected that he would carry his bat as long as possible, which the sensible batsman normally does. But he became the victim of a sudden rush of blood. He charged down the wicket against Jadhav but could only flick the ball straight to Kohli at midwicket. The expression on Kohli's face after holding that catch showed how important it was in the context of the game. The departure of Mushfiqur left Bangladesh at 179 for five in 35.2 overs.

They had plenty of overs left but unfortunately not many batsmen were around to take the total to what could have been 300-plus. They were actually in danger of being bowled out below 250 when Mosaddek Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad -- the last two recognised batsmen -- got out cheaply. Both were undone by the pace of Jasprit Bumrah.

The Tigers only reached a decent total after Mashrafe wielded his willow for a 25-ball 30 and Taskin Ahmed scored 10. But it was never defensible on a cracker of a wicket. It was another opportunity lost for the Tigers, and they could hardly blame anything but their own judgmental errors.

A heartening experience

SPORTS REPORTER from Edgbaston

As we headed off for Edgbaston from the city centre in Birmingham we knew it would take much longer than normal to reach the ground.

We were stuck in traffic for half-an-hour after a five-minute drive on a hired taxi. So we decided to walk along the road, watching a stream of people doing their morning constitutional. The road leading up the ground was full of noise. It looked like as if we were taking a long walk to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The distinctive difference being that there were more Indian fans than Bangladeshis ones.

There were also plenty of ticket touts trying to make some quick bucks. But they were neither Bangladeshi nor Indian -- they were Birmingham locals. They were selling a 30 pound ticket for 60. But if you get close to the venue feeling that it might cost less, you are mistaken. The touts close to the main entrance would demand 100 pounds for the same ticket. You will also find the hawkers selling Bangladeshi and Indian flags along with other merchandise related to both countries.

The taxi driver, who left us about 1.5 km from the ground, quipped: "I think a big match is going on in Edgbaston."

His comment was very refreshing for someone who has seen the Tigers through the bad times, when a Bangladesh game in an international event against any team invoked little interest. But the entertainment that Bangladesh carried in their semifinal against India is a big advertisement for the game and something very heartening for a Bangladesh follower.

'We need to be more mature'

SPORTS REPORTER from Edgbaston

It was not just a defeat; it was a chastening one for Bangladesh in the second semifinal of the ICC Champions Trophy against India. India won the one-sided contest by nine wickets, chasing Bangladesh's modest total of 264 for seven.

The crushing defeat not only burst the emotional bubble that has been growing for the last few days in a most painful fashion, but also brought the Tigers down to earth. It was also a tough situation for any captain to confront the press.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza however looked at the game as a missed opportunity.

"It could have been a big total. The way Tamim [Iqbal] and Mushfiqur [Rahim] were batting, we were heading for a big total. But once they were out to a part-time bowler we lost too many wickets in the middle overs. We were on top when they were batting and I thought we could have scored 330 to 340 if they were there," said Mashrafe after the match.

He also said that they did not bowl well. "I think we did not bowl in the right areas. If you don't bowl in the right

areas the short ball is not effective. If you concede one or two fours and then bowl that short delivery, that doesn't work because the batsman by that time feels on top," Mashrafe observed.

He said that they knew it would be a difficult game but they started well and were not feeling any big-match pressure.

"The way Tamim and Mushfiqur batted and the way Sabbir started it showed that we were not feeling any pressure. But we lost our way in the middle of the game," he said, adding that people always criticise you after a defeat.

He also defended the bowling unit, despite the Indian thrashing. "We have a good bowling attack. But sometimes it does not work, especially on this kind of wicket and bowling in the second half is always difficult. Yes, we will have to learn how to stop runs in such a difficult situation for the bowlers. It is always tough to bowl for wickets in these conditions and especially against a batting line-up like India," Mashrafe said. "We will have to learn how to bowl in good areas on this kind of wicket and put pressure on the opposition."

Asked who his tip to win the title is, he said: "It's a final and you can't predict which team will win the title. Both have played good cricket in the tournament

so far and I wish both teams good luck.

"I can't say why they went after a part-timer. Maybe they thought it would be easier to go against a part-time bowler," he said when asked if the shots played by Mushfiqur and Tamim were wise.

He said that Bangladesh have improved in terms of skill and technique.

"What we need is more mental maturity in this sort of situation. Once you are mentally ready, anything can be possible. It was a very disappointing result for us. We were in a situation in this game where we were controlling things, but like a few previous occasions we lost the momentum and never got it back," the captain observed.

He also defended the non-performing young players. "It's easy to drop a player if he doesn't perform. But we will also have to think if we have enough quality replacement players. I think it won't be wise to go for drastic changes. We will have to groom what we have so they can get matured enough for the next World Cup," he added.

When asked if he was still considering continuing till the 2019 World Cup, the 33-year-old Mashrafe said: "I've still not decided. Maybe, maybe not, I'm still enjoying my cricket. So that is where I stand at the moment."

BD-IND SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH	R/B	4s/6s
Tamim b Jadhav	70/82	7/1
Soumya b Kumar	0/2	0/0
Sabbir c Jadeja b Kumar	19/21	4/0
Mushfiqur c Kohli b Jadhav	61/85	4/0
Shakib c Dhoni b Jadeja	15/23	1/0
Mahmudullah b Bumrah	21/25	2/0
Mosaddek c & b Bumrah	15/26	3/0
Mashrafe not out	30/25	5/0
Taskin not out	10/14	1/0
Extras: (lb-9, w-7, nb-2, pen-5)		23
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs)		264
Did not bat: Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman.		
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-31, 3-154, 4-177, 5-179, 6-218, 7-229.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Kumar	10	1	53	2
Bumrah	10	1	39	2
Ashwin	10	0	54	0
Pandya	4	0	34	0
Jadeja	10	0	48	1
Jadhav	6	0	22	2

INDIA	R/B	4s/6s
Sharma not out	123/129	15/1
Dhawan c Mosaddek b Mashrafe	46/34	7/1
Kohli not out	96/78	13/0
Extras:		0
Total: (For 1 wkt in 40.1 overs)		265
Did not bat: Yuvraj, Dhoni, Jadhav, Pandya, Jadeja, Ashwin, Kumar, Bumrah.		
Fall of wickets: 1-87.		



The Bangladeshis made up a vocal minority of the fans at Edgbaston yesterday, with flags and stuffed Tigers scattered amongst the Indian majority. PHOTO: BCB

Afg, Windies share series

AFP, Gros-Islet



Afghanistan captain Asghar Stanikzai hopes his team will get more opportunities to face top-flight cricket nations after their ODI series against the West Indies ended in a 1-1 draw on Wednesday.

Steady rain forced the abandonment of the third and final one-dayer without a ball being bowled at St Lucia, with the series balanced at one apiece.

But Stanikzai said he believes his team did enough to show they deserve more regular matches against full-members of the ICC.

"We didn't play as well as we could have but I thought we did enough to show that we deserve to play the bigger teams more often," said Stanikzai. "This was a great experience for us and we can look forward now to what lies ahead with greater confidence."

West Indies captain Jason Holder accepted that his team faced a tough challenge.

No one thought we would reach the final: Sarfraz

AFP, Cardiff



Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed insisted he always believed his side could turn their fortunes around after they reached the Champions Trophy final with a dominant eight-wicket win over England in Cardiff.

Pace bowler Hasan Ali took three wickets as Pakistan dismissed England, the only unbeaten team left in the tournament, for a mere 211.

In marked contrast to their nail-biting chase in a three-wicket, virtual quarter-final, win over Sri Lanka in Cardiff on Monday, Pakistan then cruised to a total of 215 for two with a mammoth 77 balls to spare.

Azhar Ali (76) and Fakhar Zaman (57) dismissed England's attack to all parts of Sophia Gardens in an opening stand of 118.

What made Wednesday's win all the more impressive was that it came just 10 days after Pakistan launched their Champions Trophy campaign with a woeful 124-run hammering by arch-rivals India.

But just three days later Pakistan, the lowest-ranked side in a tournament featuring the world's top eight one-day international teams bounced back to defeat number one South Africa.

Now Pakistan could have a chance for revenge against India in Sunday's final at The Oval if the title-holders beat Bangladesh in Thursday's second semifinal at Edgbaston.

"It is a cause of great pride and happiness for myself and for the entire Pakistan nation," said Sarfraz after the semifinal triumph.



"It was a team no one gave a chance, neither here nor back home," added the 30-year-old wicketkeeper, whose 61 not out was key to the victory over Sri Lanka. "No one thought we'd reach the final." Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur said

before the semifinal that if his side played their "best game" they could "put pressure" on England.

And they did so in style, despite being without injured left-arm quick Mohammad Amir because of a back spasm.

"Today was a perfect performance from all departments," said Azhar.

"The bowlers did extremely well and got us in a very good position.

"Getting England out for 211 is never easy because they have a wonderful balance to their side and we knew if we didn't take wickets they would score heavily," he added.

"Credit goes to Sarfraz and the way he led the team, we kept taking wickets and kept the run-rate in check. It was a wonderful performance."

Meanwhile Sarfraz said the way Arthur and the South African's backroom staff had boosted morale after the India defeat had been central to their recovery.

"After the first loss, we were very down, but credit goes to the team management," said Sarfraz. "They motivated us very well."

Asked how self-belief had been restored following a defeat by India greeted with widespread condemnation back home, Sarfraz explained: "After the India match, we just motivated the guys."