

SPORTS

Two-three punch not landing

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The Champions Trophy was a demanding task for Bangladesh and while it may seem that a semifinal finish is a landmark accomplishment for the country's cricket, it can justifiably be said that the Tigers have returned from England with more questions than they had on the outward journey.

The previous tour of Sri Lanka was a happy affair for Bangladesh; the solid core of seniors was getting more than handy support from youngsters like Soumya Sarkar, Sabbir Rahman, Mosaddek Hossain and Mustafizur Rahman. However, that bubble of optimism burst in the near seven-week tour of Ireland and England, during which the seniors had to work overtime to yield results. While Mosaddek has hardly gotten opportunities to prove himself as he batted at number seven or eight, the cases of Sabbir and Soumya are a bit more concerning.

It is concerning because the Bangladesh batting has shown a tendency to either collapse or lose momentum, especially when it comes to 50-over cricket. The two-Test series against Australia in August-September will be challenging enough, but since it will be at home cracks can be papered over. That will however mean no place to hide when Bangladesh travel to the hostile territory of South Africa in October, so the Australia series and the preceding training period will be the time to sort out some of the issues.

Soumya has enjoyed one of the longest green periods under coach Chandika Hathurusingha after some fantastic innings in 2015, which was followed by 23 innings without a half-century across formats till his 86 in the second



Much was expected from young Bangladesh batsmen Soumya Sarkar (L) and Sabbir Rahman (R), but neither could justify the faith placed in them in the just-concluded ICC Champions Trophy.

Test at Christchurch in January this year. That was followed by a renaissance of sorts in Sri Lanka where he hit three consecutive half-centuries in the Tests.

He then hit two half-centuries in Ireland -- a 61 against a weakened New Zealand side and then an unbeaten 87 against Ireland, but when the going truly got tough as the Champions Trophy got underway, he could only manage 34 runs in four innings, including 28 in the first match against England and a duck in the semifinal against India.

As much as the inconsistency, it

is his position in the batting lineup that is a source of bother. His footwork is minimal, especially early on in his innings, and that is where he was found wanting against quality attacks in the Champions Trophy.

The persistence with Soumya is being justified by pointing to the damage he can do when he does click but the question to be asked here is whether Bangladesh can afford a bonus player. And if the answer is yes, the follow-up question is whether that gamble has to be taken at the pivotal opening position, when someone like Imrul

Kayes is waiting on the bench. With Sabbir, technique is not really the problem. His elevation to number three during the ODI series against Afghanistan in September last year was a welcome development as most thought that Sabbir's brand of aggression was a nice fit to drive the Tigers' innings from one-down, as long as it was allied to a bit of discretion. That discretion, however, has been missing for the most part.

Sabbir works hard on his technique, but his temperament -- the lack of which was on full display in his frenetic innings in the

semifinal -- is not yet suited to the demands of the number three position. He has been given 15 matches in the position and in his 10 innings this year he has had just two half-centuries while he looked out of depth when batting at number three in the Champions Trophy.

At the end of the Sri Lanka series, what appeared to be a settled team now seems to be in flux again, with the three youngsters in the batting line-up having to justify their places. It is now up to the team management to sort out the issues before the Aussies



PHOTOS: REUTERS FILE

SAFF C'ship in May 2018?

SPORTS REPORTER



The SAFF Championship is all set to be deferred by four months due to India's international and domestic commitments. The SAFF secretariat has, in this regard, prepared a proposal to hold the regional football extravaganza from May 1 to 12 next year in Dhaka.

Bangladesh were supposed to host the eight-nation tournament for the third time from December 25 to January 5 next year, but the All India Football Federation (AIFF) did not give their approval, owing to the deferment of the franchise-based Indian Super League (ISL).

"We can't hold the SAFF Championship without India, who have a busy international and domestic schedule. So we had to drop the idea of holding it in December this year. Now we have prepared a proposal to hold it from May 1 next year after the completion of the ISL," said SAFF general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal yesterday.

"Generally the ISL takes nearly two-and-a-half months to be completed, but this time the form of the league may change and the number of participants may be increased. So it might take more time than usual, which is why we want to host the next SAFF Championship in May 2018, before the start of Ramadan next year," Helal said, adding that they had already sent the new proposal to the AIFF for the final nod.

The SAFF secretariat is also uncertain regarding the number of participants as Pakistan have not been taking part in any international tournaments due to internal problems while Afghanistan, who quit SAFF, were invited to take part in the championship.

"We will decide on the number of participating teams at our next executive meeting as we are not sure whether Pakistan will take part after they withdrew from the upcoming age-level tournaments citing internal issues. The meeting will also have to take a decision whether to invite Afghanistan again. There is a demand from the sponsors to hold the championship with eight nations," Helal told reporters.

This year SAFF will hold three age-level tournaments. Nepal will host the SAFF U-15 Boys' Championship from September 18 to 27 while Bhutan will host the SAFF Under-18 Men's Championship from September 22 to October 1. The SAFF U-15 Women's Championship will be held in Bangladesh from November 16 to 25.

U-16 women's team suffer 2nd defeat

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The Bangladesh U-16 women's team's preparation for September's AFC U-16 Women's Championship in Thailand continued an inauspicious trend as they lost their second practice match against Sakai Academy team by a crushing 5-0 margin in Osaka yesterday.

They had suffered a 4-2 defeat in the first of three practice games against the same opponents on Monday.

Things only got worse yesterday as the Bangladesh girls, who had earlier visited Osaka in January to play in the J-Green Sakai Lady's Festival, conceded the first goal in the 38th minute, but unlike in the first game, they could not find the net as Sakai Academy added four goals in the second half.

The home team added goals in pairs, striking in the 63rd and 68th minutes before closing things off with two more goals in the 83rd and 88th minutes.

Rubel out for 4 to 6 weeks

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Pacer Rubel Hossain underwent surgery yesterday and will need four to six weeks to recover from an injury which was sustained after the Tigers' semifinal clash against India in the ICC Champions Trophy in Birmingham.

Rubel reportedly claimed that he suffered the injury, between his right eye and ear, as he collided with a door in the team hotel in Birmingham but interestingly nobody with the team in England was aware of the injury.

"I think Rubel narrowly escaped serious injury because it could have been severe had it hit the eye. A fracture was diagnosed in the zygomatic arch. After discussing with surgeons we went for surgery and accordingly Rubel underwent surgery today [Wednesday]. Everything is okay now and he will be released from hospital tomorrow if the X-ray report shows everything is fine," BCB physician Dr. Debashish Chowdhury told reporters yesterday at Mirpur.

Rubel is expected to recover before the start of the two-match Test series against Australia at home.

Australia will arrive in Dhaka on August 18 and play the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur from August 27. The second Test will be held at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong from September 4.



Becker bankrupt

AFP, London

Former German tennis star Boris Becker was declared bankrupt by a court in London on Wednesday after failing to pay a 'substantial' long-standing debt since 2015.

Lawyers for the three-time Wimbledon champion pleaded with a Bankruptcy Court registrar to allow Becker a "last chance" to pay off the debt.

But Registrar Christine Derrett, who recalled watching Becker play on Centre Court, ruled there was a lack of credible evidence the payment would be forthcoming and refused to adjourn the case.

"One has the impression of a man with his head in the sand," she said of the six-time major winner after making the bankruptcy order following a brief hearing.

The German's lawyers had argued there was sufficient evidence to show that he would be able to pay the debt soon through a refinancing arrangement, but the judge responded: "He should have thought about that a long time ago."

Greats lament KUMBLE EXIT

Post this intimation, I was informed for the first time yesterday by the BCCI that the Captain had reservations with my 'style' and about my continuing as the Head Coach. I was surprised since I had always respected the role boundaries between Captain and Coach. Though the BCCI attempted to resolve the misunderstandings between the Captain and me, it was apparent that the partnership was untenable, and I therefore believe it is best for me to move on. -- From Kumble's statement

AFP, New Delhi



Batting great Sunil Gavaskar lamented a "sad day" after Anil Kumble stepped down as India coach over a rift with captain Virat Kohli, leaving the hotseat vacant once again.

Kumble said Tuesday his position was "untenable" after Kohli questioned his leadership style and told the Indian board he had reservations about the spin legend extending his one-year stay.

Since Duncan Fletcher left in March 2015, India, currently the world's top Test team, have struggled for stability with Ravi Shastri and Sanjay Bangar both taking on temporary roles before Kumble's reign.

"I have very little knowledge about the differences between Virat and Anil. But it is a really sad day for Indian cricket," Gavaskar told NDTV.

"India have won everything since the time Anil took over," he added. "I can't see Anil doing much wrong in one year. Differences [can] happen in any team but see the results."

India suffered a humiliating defeat to Pakistan in the Champions Trophy final on Sunday, but Kumble also helped earn redemption for stability with the number-one Test ranking and maintained an unblemished record in five Test series.

Former India captain and coach Bishan Singh Bedi also signalled his disappointment, tweeting: "If there's more intelligent/committed Crk't analyst than @anilkumble 1074 on Indn horizon (we are) ignorant really!"

Former India opener Virender Sehwag and Australia's Tom Moody are reported to be among the possible replacements for Kumble.

Sehwag, who seems to be the frontrunner for the job, believes it would be tough for anyone to match Kumble's success as coach.

"The way this Indian team has performed under his coaching, I doubt whether anybody else will be able to replicate his success," Sehwag told IUC News, an online data provider.

"Team India will get his new head coach before tour to Sri Lanka. The assignment of the new head coach will be till the next World Cup to be held in June 2019 in England," said BCCI acting president CK Khanna.

Another top BCCI official, Rajesh Shukla, said possible efforts were made to sort out the issues between the captain and the coach.

When asked whether Virat Kohli was the only one who objected to



"I don't know about his coaching style but as a player, as an individual and as a senior he is just brilliant," said Sehwag, who played under Kumble's Test captaincy.

NEW COACH BEFORE SLOTTOUT
Acting president of the BCCI CK Khanna said yesterday that India would get a new coach before the tour of India next month, while conceding that the board failed to resolve the problems between Kumble and Kohli.

Kumble as coach, Shukla said: "All these are speculation. As I said, sometimes there are differences of opinion and BCCI tried its level best to resolve the whole issue but sometimes things don't work. Sometimes it happens that you can't get along with someone."

"It is not that captain is given all the importance. We give importance to everybody. There are differences sometimes. They are also human beings," Shukla added.

AUSTRALIA'S TOUR OF BANGLADESH

Gillespie backs Maxwell to fire

SMH



Former Australia fast bowler Jason Gillespie has backed Glenn Maxwell to continue his Test career in the middle-order after his breakout series against India in March.

But the biggest obstacle standing in Maxwell's way is something he cannot control and an issue he's been fighting ever since he lit up the limited-overs formats for Victoria: the crowded cricket schedule.

A three-year Test exodus was emphatically forgotten during the third Test in Ranchi when Maxwell posted a maiden century to prove he had the ability and resilience to perform in the five-day format.



GLENN MAXWELL

against Bangladesh in August-September, and he received strong support from Gillespie.

"I've long been a fan of Maxwell as a long-form player," Gillespie told crknet.com.au. "I know throughout his career he's been pretty much as a one-day and T20 player and while I agree with that, I feel that he does have the game to succeed at Test level."

"He's on the 'A' tour playing four-day cricket only and this is a good opportunity for him to get some more time in the middle playing the long form of the game in preparation for the Bangladesh Test."

"Here's an opportunity for Glenn Maxwell to put back the selectors' faith in him. Go out there, put some performances on the board and get himself ready to go, to be in the box seat to be selected for that first Bangladesh Test."