

The time to decide is now

AL-AMIN

Is the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) at a crossroads regarding its decision about a captain for the 2019 World Cup? It is two years down the line but like many other established cricket boards it is about time for the BCB to make a judicious call right now.

Although the board has done enough over the last couple of years to diminish the role of the captain -- leaving him out of the selection process, and making the coach more powerful -- the captain still played a very important part in the success story of the Tigers on the international front. We have got three captains in three different formats at the moment and apart from the one-day captain the rest appear to be a marriage of convenience -- an extremely volatile Shakib Al Hasan leading the Tigers in T20Is and an ultra-defensive Mushfiqur Rahim on the Test front.

The board however struck a fine balance between an imposing coach and an inspirational captain in the one-day format. And ever since Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was made captain for the shorter format of the game just before the 2015 World Cup, the Mashrafe-Hathurusingha partnership has done wonders for Bangladesh cricket.

These two gentlemen, one with an uncanny ability to unearth the best of a talented bunch, and the other sticking by his teammates in desperate times, delivered results beyond imagination. The impact of the two tacticians not



Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has his eyes on the 2019 World Cup, but questions remain about whether his form and fitness will hold up till the showpiece event in England and Wales.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

only took the Tigers up the ladder to an enviable sixth position in the ODI rankings but also made a contributing effect in the longer version of the game.

When Mashrafe was made captain, the board was not convinced that an otherwise injury-plagued pace bowler could run the distance. Mashrafe not only led Bangladesh to 41 ODIs since late 2014 that culminated in the semi-final of the ICC Champions Trophy against India at The Oval last month, but he was also the best performer with

the ball in that semifinal which Bangladesh lost badly.

There was a time when Bangladesh looked at cricket like a daily dose of entertainment. There was hardly any ambition from a team that seldom won a game. But over the last couple of years they have not only made every game count but become ambitious enough to plan for the future.

So, after the ICC Champions Trophy it is quite natural for Bangladesh to plan for the next big

thing -- the 2019 World Cup in England. The board has already retained a support staff revolving around Hathurusingha, who has made sure of a company that he can feel at ease with.

The Sri Lankan also had a wish that he has never addressed publicly. He has his own plan that he duly delegated to the board. And being a professional he knows the shortcomings in his team and will tell you how desperately he needed a leg-spinner of quality

or a power hitter down the batting order to give the team a complete shape.

Chandika never publicly said that he was against Mashrafe to continue as captain. But privately he would always ask Mashrafe 'if he has taken a decision' about his future. Again this is a purely professional query from a very professional coach.

But the burning question is if it is about time for Mashrafe to hand over the one-day baton to new leadership. The board will be sitting in a week's time to discuss the future shape of the Tigers and more particularly the future of Mashrafe as captain. The board is under tremendous pressure with opinions supporting Mashrafe gathering momentum.

The most popular among the opinions is that Mashrafe should be the one to decide his destiny. This is a popular slogan and it belies logic. Had it been the case, many famous cricketers would not have to be pushed into forced retirement. It is absolutely imperative for the board to decide if Mashrafe is to continue to lead the Tigers to England 2019.

Because if a decision is made it is not only easy to execute but also removes those grey areas and uncertainties that greatly affect the performance of every individual in the team.

Mashrafe is not getting younger. He is 34 and his pace is substantially reduced. He now relies on all his experience -- those cutters and slow bouncers -- to make up for his pace. While he is still one of the best pace bowling options in the team, his ability to use the long handle has diminished

greatly. There might be an argument that he is hindering the making of a third seamer who can be very a useful batter down the order. But the counter argument is that we have still two more seamers in the team so why should the blame be on Mashrafe alone. He is by far the best thinking captain and most aggressive one. His introduction of Mosaddek Hossain at a crucial stage of the New Zealand innings during the ICC Champions Trophy is one of his many masterstrokes.

Mashrafe, however, is a liability on the field. And he would never make the team if only his athleticism is considered. And for someone who had both his knees operated on seven times this is quite natural, but can't be an excuse when you expect hundred per cent from all 11 players in the middle.

The dressing room philosophy is also a very important factor to consider before deciding on a captain. Mashrafe has been the unquestionable leader for his teammates. He was successful or to some extent the coach was successful because the team rallied behind them. It is also important for the board to consider the thinking in the dressing room and individual opinions. Sport has seen very good teams under very good coaches and captains fail just because they were not motivated.

The board, we expect, will shun the idea of any publicity stunt or resorting to a temporary arrangement, which in the long run will put a smooth progress in jeopardy. The board should consider things pragmatically and come up with a logical conclusion -- be it Mashrafe or not.

Tanbir, Hasan rescue BCB HP

SPORTS REPORTER

Tanbir Hayder along with Abul Hasan rescued the BCB High Performance team from a middle-order collapse as the touring side posted a one-wicket victory over Northern Territory Invitational XI in their first one-day match at the Marrara Cricket Ground in Darwin yesterday.

In chase of 189 runs, BCB HP made a flying start thanks to captain Liton Das and Anamul Haque as the opening pair scored fifty in only six overs. After adding eight more runs to the partnership, Anamul returned to the pavilion for a 29-ball 20 and that opened the floodgates for the local side. The tourist slipped to 129 for seven as they lost wickets at regular interval.

Abul Hasan joined Tanbir to share 44 runs for the eighth wicket and helped the team achieve the target with three balls to spare. The departure of Hasan, who scored 31 off 58 balls with two boundaries, jolted the chase but Tanbir kept his cool to take the team to victory with good support from last man Jubair Hossain, who scored one run from 14 deliveries.

Tanbir was not out on 51 off 83 balls that featured four boundaries.

Earlier, Abul Hasan claimed two wickets while Abut Hider, Abu Jayed, Mohammad Saifuddin and Jubair Hossain took a wicket each to restrict the local side to 189 runs.

The BCB High Performance side will play their second one-day match today at the same venue.

Mahela looking for fun with Titans

SPORTS REPORTER

Other than the franchises who plan and prepare for their next tilt at the title in the Bangladeshi winter, the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is not at the forefront for the rest of the year. Yesterday, however, the BPL made a brief summertime return to the limelight through the bona fide star power of Sri Lanka batting legend Mahela Jayawardene, who has been named the coach of last season's third-placed side Khulna Titans.

In a meet-the-press ceremony titled 'Mahela Jayawardene: The new Titan in town' at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka the former Sri Lanka captain, who has also had a coaching stint with 2017 Indian Premier League champions Mumbai Indians, answered questions alongside retained icon player and captain Mahmudullah Riyad, Titans' advisor and current Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) selector Habibul Bashar and BCB director and Titans managing director Kazi Inam Ahmed.

The 149-Test veteran was generous in his praise for Bangladesh's improvement; the team currently sit at number seven in ODIs, having achieved a high of sixth during the recent Champions Trophy. "They've been very consistent in the last six years or so, purely because they have had a talented group of cricketers together for a long time. The younger talent seems to be very consistent."

Bangladesh's rise has come at the expense of Jayawardene's native Sri Lanka, who are placed eighth now and sustained some body blows during Bangladesh's tour of that country earlier this year.

"The bigger secret is to have a Sri Lankan coaching



Khulna Titans' new coach Mahela Jayawardene (L) shares a light moment with icon player and captain Mahmudullah Riyad during a meet-the-press event to introduce the BPL franchise's new acquisition at a Dhaka Hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

India eye redemption

Final ODI against Windies today

PTI, Kingston

Under-fire Indian batsmen will look to make amends for their stardom collapse in the previous match and complete the series win when they take on West Indies in the fifth and final one-day on Thursday.

The series appeared done and dusted when India began a modest 190-run chase but their intimidating batting line-up fell short by 11 runs in a stunning turnaround on a slow pitch.

Of all the batsmen, former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni drew the most flak for his slow batting as he played 70 dot balls in his 54-run knock off 114 balls.

It won't be a surprise if captain Virat Kohli, who minded no words in criticising his team's shot selection, brings about changes in the middle-order.

It remains to be seen if veteran Yuvraj Singh is available after suffering a hamstring injury.

The surprise win would have certainly boosted the confidence of the West Indies and they will strive even harder for a series-leveling win.

However, it will be easier said than done since Indian players would be like wounded tigers after enduring an embarrassing defeat against a second string side and are expected to come hard at the hosts.

Gayle recalled for lone T20I

PTI, Kingston

Big-hitting batsman Chris Gayle has been recalled to the West Indies squad for the lone Twenty20 International against India on Sunday. Gayle, who is the most successful batsman in the T20 format with 1519 runs at an average of 35.32, replaced Lendl Simmons.

It will be Gayle's first T20 match at his home ground, Sabina Park. The marauding batsman, who has two T20 centuries, last played an international match for the West Indies in the 2016 World T20 final against England at Eden Gardens.

"We welcome Chris back to the T20 squad. He is the most prolific batsman in this format and will add value to our team at the top of the order," Courtney Browne, Cricket West Indies' chairman of selectors, said.

England look to 'positive' Root

First Test against South Africa starts today

AFP, London

A new England era will start when Joe Root captains the Test side against South Africa at Lord's on Thursday.

Root was appointed in February after Alastair Cook, still in the team purely as an opening batsman, stood down but this week's match will be England's first Test since the change of skipper.

England will hope the captaincy drives the 26-year-old Yorkshireman on to even greater heights as it has done for two fellow star batsmen -- Australia's Steve Smith and India's Virat Kohli.

"The way Rooty goes about his cricket, he's nice and positive the way he bats, I suspect the way he will captain the team will be similar," said England's Australian coach Trevor Bayliss last week.

South Africa ended the Test cap-



South Africa skipper Dean Elgar (L) and his England counterpart Joe Root pose with the trophy at Lord's yesterday on the eve of their first Test starting today.

PHOTO: AFP

tainty of several England skippers in Nasser Hussain, Michael Vaughan and Andrew Strauss.

A similar fate, however, is unlikely to befall Root, whatever the outcome of a four-match series.

Test innings have yielded just 49 runs in total.

South Africa boast a remarkable record of having lost only one away Test series in 10 years.

They have been without AB de Villiers in Test cricket for more than 12 months and the talented batsman will miss the whole of this series as he considers his international future.

South Africa too will have a new captain in Dean Elgar but regular skipper Faf du Plessis is expected back for the second Test at Nottingham following the birth of his first child.

"He is a gutsy player," South Africa coach Russell Domingo said of opening batsman Elgar.

"He epitomises South African cricket to the tee."

The Proteas had a difficult start this tour, losing to England in both one-day and Twenty20 series either side of a first-round exit at the Champions Trophy.

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