

Tigers show some fight

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein

They took their sweet time, but after more than a month of cricket, Bangladesh finally fulfilled their captain's stated target of looking like they were a team that had come to play and gave their best. That they still lost the first T20I to South Africa on Thursday speaks to the difference in quality between the two sets of players, but in being on level terms with South Africa for around 20 of the 40 overs the visitors showed that they still have the will to fight.

During those 20 overs Bangladesh played something approaching smart cricket, but in the end it was South Africa's greater T20 nous, showcased in how they remained in contention even during Bangladesh's good periods, that won the day.

"There's no end to learning. They made nearly 200 [195] runs but we also made 175," said Soumya Sarkar, whose 47 was the highest score and it seemed like the match could be won when he was at the crease. "If one batsman did well in the middle-overs, we could have won the game easily. This will give us confidence that we can also score 200."

Bangladesh started the match with the strange decision to go in with six bowlers, but it turned out to be a smart one in the end as three of the specialists – Shafiqul Islam, Taskin Ahmed and Mohammad Saifuddin – bowled just two overs each and conceded 74 from those six overs. It seemed with the bowling failures of the tour so far in mind, the team

management and the captain decided that all the available bowling resources would be needed.

Quinton de Kock and AB de Villiers's 79-run second-wicket stand in just seven overs had threatened another embarrassing result, but

perhaps for the first time on tour or perhaps because of the compressed nature of the shortest format, some tight bowling turned things around. Mehedi Hasan Miraz continues to impress, and after two boundary-less overs from skipper Shakib Al Hasan

and himself, he was smart and brave enough to float one up to De Villiers who waited and waited but still miscued the intended hit over long on to Mahmudullah Riyad at long off. Imrul Kayes's spectacular catch at long off to dismiss Duminy was the best example of an overall sharp fielding effort, with Taskin Ahmed's misfield at short fine leg in the sixth over being the notable exception.

While the bowling after the De Kock-De Villiers stand kept the Tigers in the hunt, the batting in the first 10 overs, especially from Soumya, actually put them in front. Bangladesh were 92 for two at the end of nine overs, but Soumya's dismissal changed the complexion of the game. Unlike South Africa's stock-taking batting after the second-wicket stand was broken, which set the stage for the fifth-wicket stand of 62 in the last five overs between Farhaan Berharden and David Miller, Bangladesh's seniors in Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad perished going for big shots.

There also things the Tigers can learn from the Proteas. Despite all their talk of Bangladesh batsmen not being big-hitters, Bangladesh hit seven sixes to South Africa's five and scored 98 runs in boundaries to South Africa's 88. However, 45 dot balls played by the visitors in comparison to 22 by South Africa made the difference.

But Bangladesh seem to have found some fight left in them. If they can combine it with the smartness they displayed in parts of Thursday's T20I and learn a bit from their opponents, a repeat or something better could be in store for the tour-ending second T20I in Potchefstroom on Sunday.



For the first time on their tour of South Africa, Bangladesh players' body language in the first T20I on Thursday reflected that they were playing with a purpose.

PHOTO: AFP

Batting at No. 3 'works' for AB

AGENCIES, Cape Town



AB de Villiers said batting at No 3 "works" for him as he struck a quick-fire 49 to help the Proteas beat Bangladesh in the first T20I in Bloemfontein.

De Villiers scored his runs off only 27 balls and shared in a partnership of 79 with Quinton de Kock that set the platform for the home team to post a formidable total of 195 for 4, with Proteas eventually winning by 20 runs.

The 33-year-old only averages 26 in 77 T20I games, which is low considering De Villiers' batting ability.

One of the reasons for his low average is being shifted up and down the batting order.

Coming in after the fall of the opener Amla on Thursday, De Villiers said after the game that slotting in at No 3 works for him.

"It works for me, especially coming in within the first six overs; you can really capitalise on it," said the former Proteas skipper.

"I believe in sitting on the sidelines assessing as much as I can, watching closely; seeing what shots were working, whether it is taking turn.

"When I came out, Quinny (Quinton de Kock) told me there was quite a bit of pace and bounce in the wicket, which is something we really enjoy.

"The great thing about coming in early is that you can set yourself a foundation and then really let go, which I didn't do this time, which was disappointing."

De Villiers credits his off-season preparations for his blistering form for the Proteas against Bangladesh.



"I've worked hard this off-season by getting the basics in place again and I'm not somebody who works on too many shots," he said.

"I prefer to watch the ball, let it come to me and try and expose areas where the opposition are weak.

"I done a lot of gym work and tried to get fit again and I worked at the University of Pretoria where there were a lot of throws and spin."

With crucial series against India and Australia looming this summer, the Proteas will undoubtedly be boosted by De Villiers' impressive form.

"I know my game pretty well, I needed to work on a few technical errors - just trigger and timing - which I got right," he said.

"It clicked after my off-season in the Benoni four-day game, where the Titans played against the Warriors, something clicked there and I'm moving really well at the crease. I think the off-season paid off."

The Proteas lead the two-match T20I series 1-0, with the final match getting underway on Sunday.

Zim Cricket in cash crunch

AGENCIES, Harare

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) has been hit by a financial crunch which could affect salaries for all employees, including players. In a memo circulated within the board, Nesta Vaki, ZC's head of Corporate Affairs and Human Resources, informed the staff that they will only receive half their October salaries.

A senior board official refused to elaborate on the reasons behind the cash-flow problems and maintained that no salaries have been affected yet.

The ZC has recently incurred some hefty costs with the ongoing two-Test series against West Indies in Bulawayo set to be the board's biggest expense this month. It has also spent money on upgrades for grounds to host the 2019 World Cup Qualifier next March.

Tickets on sale from October 31

SPORTS REPORTER



Tickets for fifth edition of the money-spinning Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 Sylhet phase will be available from October 31 through three platforms.

Spectators can buy their tickets directly from United Commercial Bank or online from Shohoz.com, Surjomukhi.com.BD and gadgetbangla.com.

Tickets will also be available at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS) and Sylhet Divisional Stadium ticket booths from 10pm to 6pm during the lead up to the match days while match day sales will depend on availability.

Prices begin at Tk200 for an Eastern Stand ticket while it's Tk300 for the Western Stand, Tk 400 for the Grand Hill Area, Tk 500 for Club house seats and Tk 200 for a place in the Grand Stand.

The BPL's opening match will be on November 4 and the final will take place on December 12. Sylhet, hosting BPL fixtures for the first time, will be the setting for eight matches including the curtain raiser, which is set to be between defending champions Dhaka Dynamites and home side Sylhet Sixers.

During the league stage, ticket prices will remain the same even for matches in the Chittagong and Dhaka phases, however, the release dates for tickets in those two cities will be announced at another time.



Khulna Titans unveiled their team jersey for the upcoming fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Lahore calling them again

AFP, Lahore



Tens of thousands of security will be deployed in Lahore on Sunday when Sri Lanka become the first major cricket team to visit Pakistan since they were targeted in a deadly ambush in 2009 -- with attack survivors among those returning to the scene.

Several Sri Lankan players and officials, including their head coach, have opted out of the Twenty20 fixture, after some voiced concern about security following ongoing militant attacks.

But manager Asanka Gurusinha and batting coach Hashan Tillakaratne -- both part of the Sri Lankan team which won the 1996 World Cup final against Australia in Lahore -- will be with the squad.

Pakistan's Ahsan Raza, a reserve umpire in 2009 who was among those shot -- and needed emergency surgery to repair a collapsed lung and damaged liver -- will also be on the field.

Eight people were killed and eight wounded in the March 3, 2009 attack on Sri Lanka's bus convoy near the Gaddafi Stadium, an incident which brought cricket tours to Pakistan screeching to a halt.

Eight years later, Sri Lanka will become the first top cricket nation to play in Pakistan since the incident, accelerating a gradual resumption of international fixtures as security improves.

Sunday's game, the third and final Twenty20 -- with the other two played

in UAE -- comes after Lahore also hosted this year's Pakistan Super League final and a one-off fixture between Pakistan and a World XI last month.

Raza was wounded when Pakistani Taliban militants targeted a bus carrying officials, killing the driver. Another bus's driver was hailed as a hero after shepherding the players to safety under a hail of bullets.

"It's a great honour that I will be umpiring in the match which is bringing Sri Lanka back to Lahore," he told AFP.

"They have set their every fear aside... their tour will have a great impact on the revival of cricket in Pakistan."

Sunday's Twenty20 international is being hailed as a brave decision by Sri Lanka and a milestone for Pakistan

as it attempts to end its sporting isolation.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Najam Sethi called it a "historic moment", pointing out that a generation of fans in the cricket-mad country have grown up without seeing any international games in their home stadiums.

"Our stadiums have remained empty. Now all that is poised to change, for the better... I foresee a full fledged restoration in the next two years," he told AFP.

Stand-in skipper Thisara Perera, who played in Lahore last month as part of the World XI team, praised the security arrangements and said he had no concerns about safety.

"I am really satisfied with the security, so no problems there," he told AFP.



Sri Lankan security personnel and Pakistan Cricket Board officials visit the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Root ready for Ashes without Stokes

AFP, London



England captain Joe Root said Friday his side were prepared to be without star all-rounder Ben Stokes for the whole of their upcoming Ashes tour of Australia.

Stokes, England's vice-captain, will not fly out with the rest of the squad on Saturday, having been suspended from international duty following an incident outside a Bristol nightclub in September.

The Durham ace remains under investigation after being arrested on suspicion of causing actual bodily harm.

Stokes and England are still waiting to discover if he will face criminal charges.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has yet to rule him out of the five-Test series, which starts in Brisbane on November 23, but he is not currently available for selection.

"We've got to make sure we plan and prepare as a squad and look to approach it as if this is our team going out there for the tour," Root told reporters at Lord's on Friday.

Ashes-holders England have yet to name a replacement vice-captain but Root said there was no need to rush that decision.

"We will have to sit down and chat about that," said the Yorkshire batsman. "It's something that's ongoing and over the course of the next few weeks we'll come to a decision."

Meanwhile Root added neither he nor anyone else in the England hierarchy had received any indication as to whether Stokes would face criminal charges.

"To be brutally honest, I am in exactly the same position as you," he said. "It's an

ongoing investigation. We don't really know how long things are going to take and I think we've just got to sit tight and wait."

England have suffered humiliating 5-0 series defeats on two of their last three Ashes tours of Australia, although they did enjoy a 3-1 triumph in 2010/11.

Many pundits believe that without Stokes they have no chance of a successful tour this time around, but Root said: "He is a fine player but I see a squad of players that's more than capable of going over there and doing something really special."

Meanwhile Root denied England had a



England captain Joe Root displays the Ashes urn at Lord's yesterday ahead of their departure to Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

drinking culture as he vowed there would be no repeat of the incident that had put Stokes's Ashes participation in jeopardy.

"We know that what's happened hasn't been good enough and we are determined to get that right," he said.

"I don't think there's a drinking culture in our side... We are grown men, we know how to behave and we'll make sure we conduct ourselves well on this tour."

K Sports, LP Gas enter agreement

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara LP Gas Ltd has signed an agreement with K Sports who are entitled by the Bangladesh Cricket Board to organize the ground branding and title sponsorship for the fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League, which begins on November 4.

Jasim Uddin, Bashundhara LP Gas Ltd's head of marketing, and K Sports CEO Fahad Karim signed the agreement at Bashundhara Headquarters-2 on Thursday.

This agreement acknowledges that Bashundhara LP Gas Ltd is now the sponsor for the Strategic Time-out Screen during the BPL matches.

SL 124 for 9

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Sri Lanka made 124 for 9 against Pakistan in the 2nd T20 international in Abu Dhabi on Friday.

Medium pacer Fahim Ashraf achieved a hattrick in his 3-16 off three overs -- the first by a Pakistani bowler in the format.

Opener Danushka Gunathilaka smashed a 48-ball 51 with four boundaries and a six while Sadeera Samarawickrama made 32 as Sri Lanka lost their last eight wickets for just 18 runs.