



## Fifth time lucky for Tigers?

SPORTS REPORTER



Over the years Bangladesh have won a number of bilateral series both at home and abroad and a couple of league-format tournaments involving lower-ranked sides, but one thing that they have not yet done is to win the final of a tournament involving three or more teams. With the most recent final defeat against Sri Lanka in Dhaka in January this year, Bangladesh have now lost four finals of multi-nation tournaments. As the Tigers go into another tournament final today, let us have a brief recap of what happened in those four previous finals.

Tri-nation ODI tournament, 16 Jan 2009, Dhaka (2-wicket defeat against Sri Lanka)

The sequence of defeats started in 2009, with a heartbreaking two-wicket defeat against Sri Lanka in a tri-nation ODI tournament, which also involved Zimbabwe.

This was a low-scoring affair as Bangladesh got bowled out for 152, with an unbeaten 43 from Rokibul Hasan being the highest scorer. However, the hosts looked set for an upset victory when they reduced Sri Lanka for five for six, only to see Kumar Sangakkara resurrect the innings with 59 runs before an unbeaten 38 from Farveez Maharoof and an incredible unbeaten 16-ball 33 from Muttiah Muralidaran snatched the victory away from the Tigers.

Asia Cup, 22 March 2012, Dhaka (2-run defeat against Pakistan)

The same dose was repeated three years later, albeit in a more heart-wrenching fashion, with a two-run defeat against Pakistan in the final of the 2012 Asia Cup in Dhaka.

Bangladesh had the momentum on their side as they had won the previous two matches against Sri Lanka and India after having suffered a close defeat against Pakistan in the tournament's first match.

Chasing a target of 235 after having won the toss, the Tigers seemed on course for a famous victory, thanks to Tamim Iqbal's 60 and Shakib Al Hasan's 68. However, Bangladesh kept losing wickets at regular intervals as the target came closer and with nine runs needed off the last over, Mahmudullah Riyad, who stayed unbeaten on 17, failed to keep enough of the strike as Bangladesh eventually fell to a two-run defeat.

Asia Cup, 6 March 2016, Dhaka (8-wicket defeat against India)

The next final defeat came in Dhaka four years later, this time in the T20s and the opposition being India. This was a much more straightforward defeat though and there were no drama or heart-stopping moments.

Having lost the toss, the hosts were invited to bat, and all they could muster in the match curtailed to 15-over-a-side, despite an unbeaten 13-ball 33 from Mahmudullah, was 120 for the loss of five wickets. The total proved to be way too little for the vaunted Indian batting line-up, which got the runs out of the way in 13.5 overs losing only two wickets.

Tri-nation final, 27 January 2018, Dhaka (79-run defeat against Sri Lanka)

Bangladesh started this ODI tournament like absolute favourites, dispatching Zimbabwe by eight wickets and thrashing Sri Lanka by 163 runs before handing a 93-run defeat to Zimbabwe again in their first three matches to book an early berth in the final. However, a 10-wicket defeat against the Lankans in the reverse fixture shifted the momentum as the hosts started the final as underdogs.

However, they thought they had a real shout at winning the final of a multi-nation event for the first time when they restricted the Lankans to 221. But their batting let them down heavily yet again. All they could manage was 142 in 41.1 overs, despite a wonderful knock of 76 from that man Mahmudullah again.

So after losing four finals against three Asian giants, is it time yet for the Tigers to break their final jinx? After having snatched a heroic win against Sri Lanka in the virtual semifinal, the Tigers should feel they have all the confidence to win the title. But will that be enough against a side, albeit not a full-strength one, that they have never beaten before in this format and have conceded two defeats against whom in this very tournament?



Out of cricket for one-and-a-half months due to a finger injury, Shakib Al Hasan enjoys a much-needed net batting session at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo ahead of today's final against India.

PHOTO: BCB

## BCB regrets Friday's fury

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The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) stated yesterday that it regrets Friday's unsavoury episode, when the Tigers went on an emotional override following a questionable umpiring ruling in the final over of the virtual Nidahas Trophy semifinal against hosts Sri Lanka.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) regrets the unfortunate happenings during Friday's Nidahas Trophy match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The Board accepts that the conduct of the Bangladesh Team in certain instances was unacceptable on a cricket field. We understand that the events may have transpired due to the importance of the match and the pressure that comes with it but feel that the expected level of professionalism was not exhibited by the team while dealing with a tense situation in the game. The Bangladesh Team members have been reminded of their responsibility in upholding the spirit of cricket at all times," read a BCB statement.

## Ready to build on Riyad's foundation

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's T20I and Test captain Shakib Al Hasan said yesterday that after Mahmudullah Riyad fulfilled his promise of taking the Tigers to the Nidahas Trophy final, it was now about time for him to take it one notch higher.

"Riyad bhai fulfilled his target as the captain, but maybe I have a new target. I think goals are set realistically," the champion all-rounder told reporters ahead of Sunday's final against India.

Shakib missed the first three games of the tri-nation T20I tournament due to a finger injury, which he sustained during the tri-nation in Dhaka in January. However, the left-hander flew to Colombo before Friday's virtual semifinal against the Lankans, where Mahmudullah scored a magnificent 18-ball unbeaten 43. The right-hander hit a six off the penultimate delivery with six runs required, to pull off a thrilling two-wicket win which was marred by overflowing emotions with Shakib at the centre of that unwanted episode in the final over with Bangladesh needing 12 runs.

The incident involving Shakib took place after the

second ball of the final over of the Bangladesh innings when he came to the edge of the boundary and asked his batsmen to come off the field. The Bangladesh team alleged that the square-leg umpire had signalled a no-ball following a second over-the-shoulder bouncer before changing his decision, prompting Shakib to call the batsmen back to the pavilion.

However Shakib, who was fined 25 per cent of his match fee and received one demerit point for his involvement in the incident, said that he and his team were looking ahead instead of delving into Friday's incident.

"What happened yesterday [Friday], let it remain like that. We don't want to discuss these things. The two cricket boards have had good relations for the last 10-15 years. The players have great relations too. We are all okay with it. We must move forward from this," said the Bangladesh skipper.

The skipper's attention was then again drawn to the final, particularly about whether the Tigers suffered from a bit of a mental block after getting to within touching distance of a trophy. They have previously made it to the final of four multi-nation tournaments, but have failed to win even one.

After spouting the usual line of it being 'just another

match albeit an important one', Shakib added: "I would hope that none of our players have that mental block. It would help us to play well. If we think it is a big final against India, then it is pressure. Rather we should think about it as a bat versus ball contest."

He also believes that the experience from three lost finals will help the side but cautioned that they must not take on any undue pressure.

"Experience always comes to good use. We need to ensure good cricket. We are not thinking too far ahead. We have to be relaxed and open-minded. It is important to be mentally free to do well in T20s. I hope no one takes any pressure, and stays focused on the process."

The southpaw added that the toss would not have much of an impact on their game plan as long as the players remain focused.

"The wicket doesn't really change much. If we bat first, our focus will be to put up a good total on the board. If we bat second, then we have to stop them for a reasonable score," was his straightforward assessment.

The 30-year-old also hinted that Bangladesh would be tailoring their plans to the weaknesses and strengths of each Indian batsman, saying that technology was being used to decode each of the opposing players.

## Pietersen played his last?

AFP, London

Kevin Pietersen dropped a strong hint that he has retired after the polarising former England star decided not to join Quetta Gladiators in Lahore for their Pakistan Super League play-off.

Pietersen helped Quetta qualify from the group stages in the Twenty20 tournament, but with the event now moving from the UAE to Pakistan, he appears to have opted to bring down the curtain on his controversial playing career.

The 37-year-old batsman hinted at his long-expected retirement with a Tweet which simply read "Boots Up! Thank you" before expanding on his situation on Saturday.

"Someone just tweeted to tell me that I scored 30000+ runs including 152 fifty's & 68 hundreds in my pro career," he wrote on Instagram.

"4 Ashes wins. Home & away! T20 WC win. Beaten India in India. Home & away 100's in all major Test nations apart from Bangladesh.

"All dedicated to my family who have just been the most unreal supporters through thick & thin! I'm super proud of everything! Thank you for all the quite lovely msgs! I loved entertaining you all! Ciao, cricket! I love this game!"

## India wary of feisty Bangladesh

AFP, Colombo



India's wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik Saturday said Bangladesh are always a tricky opposition and that his team would bring high intensity to the Twenty20 tri-series final between the two sides today.

Skipper Rohit Sharma's team were the first to book their place in the final after winning three of their four games at Colombo's R Premadasa Stadium.

India hold a psychological edge going into the tournament decider, with a 7-0 record in T20s against Bangladesh.

But Karthik insisted India would not take Bangladesh lightly after the Shakib Al Hasan-led team stunned Sri Lanka, beating the hosts by two wickets on Friday to reach the final.

"In sub-continent conditions, (Bangladesh) are a very good team," Karthik told

reporters.

"When we play Bangladesh, if we win, it's like 'Ok, you've won against Bangladesh', but if we lose, it's like: 'Dude, you've lost to Bangladesh. What are you doing?'"

India went into the tournament without top guns Virat Kohli and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, and lost their opening match to Sri Lanka, but soon bounced back to win three straight games.

Karthik, a powerful middle-order batsman who is mostly a second-choice wicketkeeper behind Dhoni, said the team has not lost focus in the absence of big names.

"The first thing (Sharma)... said was that although we have a few of our other players missing, we're looking to play exactly the sort of cricket that we've played in the past one year. We're looking to win every match," Karthik said.

India are third in the world T20 rankings, with Pakistan at the top, while Bangladesh are 10th below minnows Afghanistan.



Stand-in India captain Rohit Sharma (C) will look for a repeat batting exploit against Bangladesh in today's final.

PHOTO: AFP

## Monkey off their backs

MAZHAR UDDIN from Colombo



Six years ago in the final of the Asia Cup in Mirpur, Bangladesh required nine runs from the last over against Pakistan, but Mahmudullah Riyad

found himself stranded at the wrong end of the crease and could only watch as the Tigers fell to a heart-breaking two-run defeat.

Four years later, in an ICC World T20 Super 10 group match against India in Bangalore, Bangladesh again required nine runs from six balls. Mahmudullah took a single from the first ball before Mushfiqur Rahim struck back-to-back boundaries off Hardik Pandya and burst into an early, ill-advised celebration before Bangladesh went on to lose their remaining three wickets off the last three balls to succumb to another heart-breaking one-run defeat.

Over the two years since that one-run defeat, Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah were often criticised for playing those needless big shots. So then it could be described as poetic justice that both Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur went on to single-handedly guide Bangladesh to victories in their two triumphs against Sri Lanka in the ongoing Nidahas Trophy.

The brothers-in-law and in-arms took Bangladesh to two of the most dramatic victories not just in the shortest format of the game, but in the history of Bangladesh cricket.

It was first Mushfiqur's turn to compensate for the mistakes of Bangalore and the wicketkeeper-batsman played the best innings of his T20 career, but this time he did not even celebrate after levelling the scores. It was only after he had flicked Thisara Perera towards mid-wicket to complete Bangladesh's



Mushfiqur Rahim (L) and Mahmudullah Riyad finally provided that skill and steely determination to win a game from pressure situations.

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

record 215-run chase that he finally celebrated, that too with aplomb -- a big scream right in the face of the bowler was followed by the diminutive batsman bursting into the now famous Nagin Dance.

The dominant feature of that 35-ball 72 was the responsibility that Mushfiqur took upon his shoulders. The former Test captain scored 18 of the 19 runs required by Bangladesh from the last 12 balls, refusing to leave the job for the batsman at the other end.

Absolution was awaiting Mahmudullah too and the calmest personality in the Bangladesh team delivered when it mattered most. Despite the no-ball incident in the final over which saw nearly every member of the Bangladesh team lose their head, Mahmudullah kept his cool. After all that chaos, Bangladesh were

left needing 12 runs off the last four balls and Mahmudullah first struck an incredible one-footed boundary off Isuru Udana before taking a double and finishing the game off in style with a six.

It was another case of compensating for the nightmare in Bangalore. When Mahmudullah, who scored an unbeaten 18-ball 43, walked in, the Tigers required 51 to win. Shakib Al Hasan's dismissal left Bangladesh needing 23 runs and Mahmudullah announced himself as the perfect finisher by scoring all 23 of those runs by himself to lift Bangladesh into the final of the Nidahas Trophy.

There is a saying that you only learn from your mistakes and both Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah seem to have followed that path to redemption.