

Colts set for win in Baroda

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Under-17 team were in pole position to win a second three-day contest against their Afghanistan counterparts in Baroda yesterday.

Afghanistan Colts were bundled out for 96 after Bangladesh put on a massive first-innings total of 500 for 7 declared on the second day. They were 5 for one at stumps after being asked to follow-on. Left-arm pace bowler Mritunjoy Chowdhury destroyed the Afghan batting with a five for 13 while Rishad Hossain took three wickets for six runs. Mritunjoy also finished with a match-haul of eight wickets in the first game.

Earlier, resuming the day on 368 for three, Amite Hasan and Shahadat (59) took the score close to 500, putting on 103 runs for the fifth wicket. Amite, tipped as a future prospect, scored 91. He stuck five boundaries but he is one of those players who are very good at rotating the strike, be it against pace or spin. The technically sound right-hander also struck 83 in the drawn first game. Earlier, on the opening day, opener Prantik Newaz Nabil hit a superb 128, his second century in as many games. He scored 117 in the first game. Captain Emon also scored a fine 89.



(Anticlockwise from Bottom L) A glum-looking Bangladesh contingent, with Soumya Sarkar at the front, arrive at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday morning capping off an excellent-yet-ultimately-heartbreaking Nidahas Trophy campaign in Sri Lanka. (Top L) Batsman Sabbir Rahman, who scored a brilliant 77 in a losing cause in the final against India, probably was the only member to manage a smile.

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

A largely positive tour

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The Bangladesh team returned yesterday from a T20I tri-series in Sri Lanka battered, bruised and weary, but they returned with their cricketing reputation bearing a new sheen. On Sunday, it was just one ball and one hammer blow that separated a maiden multi-nation silverware from the Tigers' grasp, but Bangladesh reaching and nearly winning the final was not the only sign of a team growing in stature on the field even as foundations remain shaky off it.

Their departure for the Nidahas Trophy at the beginning of this month was one tinged with despair after they had lost in all formats to Sri Lanka at home. It was then thought that with T20Is being Bangladesh's weakest suit, there was not a snowball's chance in hell that they would get much joy against a confident Sri Lanka at home and a well-drilled India team that, though missing many of their stars, was a cut above.

That they managed to beat Sri Lanka twice, in stirring fashion each time, and almost beat India in the final is testament to the players' resolve and, at long last, some awareness about the demands of the shortest format of the game.

TIGERS GET SMART

After overseeing the Test and T20I series losses to Sri Lanka at home in his stand-in leadership role, Mahmudullah Riyad had seemed defiant when he broke from country tradition in refusing to say that Bangladesh batsmen were not able to hit big shots in the shortest format. He insisted instead that his batsmen were able to punish the wayward balls by playing smartly and that is what he and Mushfiqur Rahim did in the two defeats of Sri Lanka.

Mushfiqur's 35-ball 72 was the innings that started the fire as he remained unbeaten while guiding Bangladesh to their highest successful T20I chase of 215 against Sri Lanka in their second league game. True to Mahmudullah's words, the match was won by smart and skilful batting that relied on Mushfiqur knowing clearly where the fielders were and what his options were. Mahmudullah practised what he preached in the next game against Sri Lanka -- one memory that will stick from that game is the one-handed lofted boundary to extra cover off a ball quite wide outside off stump when 12 runs were needed from the last four balls. It was a shot that would not have come naturally to a batsman if he did not have a blueprint of the field set in his mind's eye.

SUPPORT CAST FLICKERS TO LIFE

It is no secret that the likes of Shakib, Mushfiqur,

Mahmudullah and Tamim Iqbal do most of the heavy lifting, but happily, in the Nidahas Trophy the youngsters stepped up. Liton Das hit a fabulously aggressive 43 in that record chase against Sri Lanka; Mehedi Hasan Miraz, for the most part, did the job of bowling spin with the new ball admirably; pacer Mustafizur Rahman, while often expensive, showed signs that he may be getting back to his best, not least in conceding just one run in the 18th over which started with India needing 35 off three in the final. Last but not least, Sabbir Rahman ignored a clock quickly running out and stroked a classy 50-ball 77 in the all-important final.

There is still much for the youngsters to reach the levels of their seniors, but the Nidahas Trophy was certainly a step in the right direction.

NOT ALL ROSY

However, problems remain and the BCB will do well to address them. Shakib's outburst in the final league game, which Mahmudullah won with a six off the penultimate ball against Sri Lanka, is one of the lowest points of the tournament. That a captain would see it fit to call the batsmen off after an umpiring error points to a lack of discipline in the dressing room and the sooner they can net a head coach who will rule with a firm hand, the better.

'Slowly gaining confidence in T20Is'

SPORTS REPORTER



The Nidahas Trophy final may have been lost in one of the most painful endings in Bangladesh cricket history with India batsman Dinesh Karthik powering a flat six off Soumya Sarkar with five runs required off the last ball on Sunday night, but Monday morning dawned with a mild sense of achievement mixed in with the despair of the previous night. Most of the Bangladesh players -- save those going to Lahore to play in the Pakistan Super League -- returned to Dhaka around noon yesterday, and the feeling was markedly different from the team's last touchdown from a foreign tour last November after they had spent a month and a half being whipped from coast to coast in South Africa.

"Our boys suffered a lot more than us and were more disappointed," said Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport

which can't be written off easily."

It is hard to know what event he was talking about that could not be written off easily -- perhaps it was the ugly scenes during the last group game against Sri Lanka when, after an umpiring error, skipper Shakib Al Hasan called the batsmen back and non-playing member Nurul Hasan got into verbal scuffles with Thisara Perera and Kusal Mendis.

Nurul, along with Shakib, was handed a 25 per cent fine and a demerit point and yesterday spoke about the events during that ill-tempered night. "I entered the field and was talking to [Mahmudullah] Riyad bhai [who after resumption won the match with a penultimate-ball six] before I asked leg-umpire whether the first delivery was a bounce."

"Then Thisara came and told me 'who are you to talk? Go away, you don't have to talk'."

"I told him that I wasn't talking to him. It was at that point that he verbally abused me. I told him that it was none of his business. Maybe I should have kept quiet. In the heat of the moment maybe I replied to him."

Windies closer to WC

STAR SPORTS DESK



West Indies raced closer to the World Cup when they beat Zimbabwe by four wickets at the Harare Sports Club yesterday.

In a high-scoring affair, Windies toppled the Brendan Taylor-led Zimbabwe's impressive 289 with six balls to spare despite losing their star opener Chris Gayle early in the chase. Marlon Samuels hit a superb 86 off 80 balls after Gayle departed for 17. Evin Lewis (64) and Shai Hope (76) also scored fifties as West Indies recorded their fifth-highest successful chase in ODI history.

Zimbabwe have so far clinched a few close games in this World Cup Qualifiers. For once, however, the result went against them

although they ran close to make it exciting after the departure of Samuels with the West Indies losing four wickets for 20 runs. But Rowman Powell settled it in the penultimate over with a massive six off left-arm spinner Sean Williams. This meant they were well in control of their fate heading into their final group fixture against Scotland.

Earlier, Taylor scored 138 -- his 10th ODI hundred -- but received little support in Zimbabwe's 289 all out.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ZIMBABWE: 289 all out in 50 overs (Taylor 138, Mire 45, Williams 34; Holder 4/35, Roach 3/55)

WEST INDIES: 290 for 6 in 49 overs (Samuels 86, Lewis 64, Hope 76; Muzarabani 2/36)

Result: West Indies won by 4 wickets
Player-of-the-match: Marlon Samuels



Brendan Taylor hit a superb 138 but it was not enough for Zimbabwe to avoid a four-wicket defeat against the West Indies in Harare yesterday.

PHOTO: ICC

Tamim, Riyad off to Lahore

SPORTS REPORTER



While most of the national cricketers including skipper Shakib Al Hasan returned home yesterday morning from Colombo, opener Tamim Iqbal and vice-captain Mahmudullah Riyad stayed back not for some sightseeing but to take a flight to Lahore to feature in a crucial Pakistan Super League (PSL) game.

Tamim's Peshawar Zalmi will take on Mahmudullah's Quetta Gladiators in the Eliminator 1 match at the Gaddafi Stadium today. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has also approved the participation of Shakib Al Hasan, pacer Mustafizur Rahman and batsman Sabbir Rahman in the PSL, Pakistan's T20 tournament that normally takes place in the desert cities of Dubai and Sharjah. But this time around, the last four games of the tournament have been billed in Karachi and Lahore, with the final slated for March 25 at Karachi.

Shakib, with a finger injury, did not feature in a single PSL game for Zalmi this year. Sabbir Rahman, who played a couple of round robin games for Zalmi, asked for an NOC from the board and got it. However he returned home with the team yesterday and was not sure whether he would be flying out to Lahore from Dhaka.

Mustafizur on the other hand, took a week's leave from the board. The left-arm quick had opted to spend time with his family instead of featuring in the PSL as his franchise Lahore Qalandars failed to make it to the playoffs. For the other players who returned home yesterday, after that heart-stopping last-ball defeat against India in the Nidahas Trophy final on Sunday, the next destination will be the ongoing Dhaka Premier League, the lone List A competition in the country.

Bangladesh's next international assignment is in June against Afghanistan before a full series against the West Indies, which may be pushed to August from July. The BCB has confirmed three ODI's against an up and coming Afghanistan, who have just been awarded Test status. The matches will likely be played in the Indian city of Dehradun from the first week of June.



Bangladesh batsman Mushfiqur Rahim (C) speaks to reporters while BCB president Nazmul Hassan and team manager Khaled Mahmud (R) look on after their arrival in Dhaka from Colombo yesterday morning.

PHOTO: STAR

yesterday. "They broke down a lot but I told them that winning or losing isn't the most important. What I want is good cricket. They played every game well and like heroes."

"I spent the most time with the team during this series. From the first to the last. The feeling when we left the country [for Sri Lanka] was different [on the back of losses in all formats to Sri Lanka at home] to what we experienced when we went there and now that we are back, the experience is different," Hassan said about the Tigers' collective spirit during the tournament.

"We lost after getting so close; I think all Bangladeshis are feeling the same. Certainly from a position where we could win, it is hard to accept that we lost. There are events

The most telling quote, expectedly, was from a playing member and a senior who played stellar hands in Bangladesh's march to the final.

"In the last few years, there has been this confidence that we were doing well in ODI and Test formats and on our day we can beat anyone. I think in T20 we are slowly gaining that confidence as well."

"We made it to the final and in that respect it does feel good but it is natural that everyone will feel bad after the defeat," said Mushfiqur Rahim, who was the tournament's second-highest run-scorer with 199 runs, including a 35-ball 72 that sealed Bangladesh's highest successful chase in their second group game against Sri Lanka.