

# SPORT

## Tigers starting to tick the boxes



Captain Shakib Al Hasan and batsman Tamim Iqbal led the lap of honour after Bangladesh's 19-run victory over West Indies in the third and final T20I, which sealed a historic 2-1 series victory at Lauderhill in Florida yesterday. (R) Bangladesh players said they felt like they were playing at home as the atmosphere created by a strong expatriate community resembled Mirpur during the last two T20Is.

PHOTO: BCB

AL-AMIN

Bangladesh's away series have never been as remarkable as it was in the just-concluded West Indies tour that ended with a 2-1 T20I series triumph, thanks to a 19-run (D/L method) victory in the third and final game in Lauderhill, Florida yesterday.

The win at the Central Broward Stadium, which turned into a little Bangladesh over the last couple of days with a strong diaspora of Bangladeshi fans, provided the perfect finish to a tour that started disastrously. After a hopeless 2-0 Test series defeat where the Tigers were bowled out for their lowest total of 43 in Antigua on the opening day of the month-long tour, the success in the shortest format after a 2-1 ODI series victory is an apt narrative of the bad, the good and the brilliant.

In a country where a defeat or a win is treated more emotionally than logically, the biggest

achievement of almost the same group, who were loathed after the Test series, is their mental fortitude of overcoming adversity. After the disappointment of the Test series, Bangladesh were expected to do better in the one-dayers, a format they have excelled in since the 2015 World Cup. Still there were not many instances for Bangladesh to stage a turnaround after such a demoralising start in an away series. But they did it in some style under the inspirational leadership of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

The men in red and green could have won the ODI series 3-0 had not Mushfiqur Rahim showed his uncanny ability of throwing things away when victory appeared just a formality. West Indies are a struggling side in the fifty-over format; they have managed to sneak into the 2019 World Cup finals as one of the two qualifiers. So, in that context and given their rankings, Bangladesh's successes were not a surprise. The heartening aspect, however, was the determination of the same group to learn from

their mistakes. Opener Anamul Haque might have been a total waste as Tamim Iqbal's opening partner in the series, but Shakib Al Hasan's elevation to the crucial number three position has so far been a revelation. It was not only the three important partnerships between Tamim and Shakib that set the tone for big totals in ODIs, but also the assured approach of the two seasoned left-handers, Shakib in particular, which made the Tigers more compact. And that also made a positive impact in the following three-match T20I series.

The West Indies tour can be best described as a lesson learnt from every mistake, which is the hallmark of a fiercely competitive team. And more importantly, it is the senior members of the team who showed the greater hunger of learning the hard way. Tamim has always been suspect against spinners early on. His strike-rate dramatically drops once spin is introduced early on. But this was a series where Tamim not only showed an amazing consistency in scoring runs, but also

showed his undeniable hunger for handling spinners better with every passing game.

Bangladesh's success in the shorter version once again heavily depended on the fantastic five - Mashrafe, Shakib, Tamim, Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah Riyad. But this series is also a success story of two young bowlers. Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan was a key component in Bangladesh's ODI attack manned by an ageless Mashrafe.

Muastafizur Rahman might have proved expensive at times, but he has not only shown that he is getting his rhythm back coming from a series of injuries, but he also provided the best bowling brain in the team after Mashrafe. His wicket-taking exploits in both ODIs and T20Is at crucial moments is something that has turned Bangladesh from pretenders to winners more often than not. It is also refreshing to see right-arm pacer Rubel Hossain showing signs of shrugging off death-over disappointments.

Our mighty neighbours India are these days more competitive away from home not solely because they have got a champion batsman in Virat Kohli, but more importantly, they have got a quality quick bowling attack. And this is an area where Bangladesh need to focus on more. The Tigers have got the raw force; what they need though is to provide the platform at home so that the raw force can fine tune its skill ahead of a hectic schedule leading up to the World Cup in England next year.

The 2-1 T20I success against current world champions West Indies is the biggest achievement for Bangladesh in terms of quality cricket they have played as a unit and the mental toughness they demonstrated when the going got tough. They played with one bowler short in the last game, they were hit for massive sixes and in those desperate times they showed their biggest attribute -- the composure. It will only augur well for their next big assignment -- the Asia Cup.

### Tigers to return Aug 9

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national cricket team will return home on August 9 following their triumphs in both the three-match ODI and T20I series against West Indies. However, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim will return to the country at a later date while ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who is currently in the United States, will return on August 11.

The Tigers' next assignment is the Asia Cup in the United Arab Emirates.

Bangladesh will take on Sri Lanka in the tournament opener on September 15.

Although Bangladesh began the tour of West Indies on a losing note -- the 2-0 loss in the Test series -- the Tigers bounced back under Mashrafe to clinch the ODI series 2-1 and register their first ODI series win away from home in nine years.

In the following T20I series, it was Shakib who led Bangladesh to victory by sealing the decisive third match by 19 runs (D/L method) at Lauderhill yesterday.

## 'Couldn't have asked for anything more' Nazmul gets 25 stitches

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan celebrated his side's T20I series victory against world champions West Indies with gusto in Florida yesterday.

The Bangladesh Test and T20I skipper laid his hands on the trophy with a big smile on his face. There were a number of reasons for Shakib to be relieved with this success. The 31-year-old all-rounder not only led his side from the front, which earned him the player-of-the-series award, but also found exuberance on the field to inspire his side to bounce back from a poor showing in the first T20I at St Kitts to win the series 2-1.

The ordinary performance in the three-match T20I series against Afghanistan in Dehradun on his return to captaincy raised questions about his involvement with the team, which grew louder following the lacklustre performance in the two-match Test series that started the tour of West Indies and North America. But he brilliantly maintained the tempo of the team after ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza turned things from the 2-0 debacle in the Tests to a 2-1 win in the three-match ODI series. The gumption and grit required to recover from a bad start on a tour



Even though he was not part of the playing eleven, young all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz had no shortage of spirit as he choreographed the Tigers' post-match celebrations at Lauderhill in Florida yesterday. PHOTO: BCB

was the reason Shakib heaped praise on the team effort and saw this success as a new beginning.

Being a true leader, Shakib was however not completely lost in emotion and instead summarised the outcome of the Caribbean tour in perhaps the best way when the

experienced campaigner said: "We now need to work on Test cricket. We are already doing well at home, now we need to go outside home and start winning Test matches."

He perhaps reminded everybody that the dismal performance in the Test series cannot simply be

forgotten because of the success in the ODIs and T20Is.

Shakib however was understandably excited with the T20I series success as there had been a belief that the shortest format of the game remained a hostile territory for the Tigers. Moreover, the success

came against a side that are not only world champions but also a formidable force in this format.

"Unbelievable effort from the boys. After losing the first game, we showed a lot of character. Everybody believed we could come back. We were facing the world champions, and we showed great character," he said during the presentation ceremony.

"Our record in T20s is not that great and hopefully from now on we can kick on," he added. "Just really proud of the boys. Even the guys not playing put their heart into it and tried to help in whatever way they could. Couldn't have asked for anything more."

The Bangladesh skipper was happy that they were starting to win more close matches. "We know now how to win matches, especially tight matches. We kept on losing so many matches after going close but now we have started to win."

Shakib contributed with both bat and ball throughout the series and the ace all-rounder expressed his satisfaction over his performance.

"I think I was batting well throughout the series. I was hitting the ball well, and that gave me the confidence which also helped me bowl well and captain well."

Finally, he thanked the fans in Florida. "We never felt like we were away from home thanks to the fans. They were like the 12th man."

SPORTS REPORTER

Left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam Apu got 25 stitches on his bowling hand due to an injury he suffered while trying to stop a ball off his own bowling during the third and final T20I against West Indies at Lauderhill yesterday.

After Nazmul was introduced in the fifth over, the incident occurred off the third ball of the over as the left-armer attempted to stop a strike by Marlon Samuels towards mid-on. The non-striker batsman Chadrick Walton tried to get out of the incoming ball's way but unintentionally stepped on Nazmul's finger.

The spinner was then immediately rushed to a hospital, leaving Soumya Sarkar to complete the last three deliveries of that over.

X-ray reports later revealed that there were no visible fractures or damage to his ligaments. However, the cricketer has been advised to take rest while the stitches are expected to be removed after two weeks.



Opener Liton Das acknowledges the crowd's applause on reaching his maiden limited-overs half-century during the third and final T20I against West Indies yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Liton stakes his claim

SPORTS REPORTER

Liton Das repaid faith of the selectors as the wicketkeeper-batsman struck a magnificent 32-ball 61 in the third T20I to help Bangladesh clinch the three-match T20I series by 19 runs through the Duckworth-Lewis method in Lauderhill yesterday.

The stylish right-hander was instrumental in providing Bangladesh a flying start which began with a swept four off leg-spinner Samuel Badree in the first ball of the innings.

Along with fellow opener Tamim Iqbal, Liton laid the platform for a big total as the pair added 61 runs for the first wicket inside five overs.

Despite losing his partner, the right-hander went on to register his maiden fifty in limited-overs cricket which powered a total of 184 for five -- the highest score of the series.

"It is definitely a big win for our team. They are a very good team and the World champions. The pitch was

similar to the surface in our country. This is my first fifty and I'm lucky," player-of-the-match Liton said yesterday.

There were a lot of concerns from the team management about finding a stable opening partner for Tamim in all three formats as Soumya Sarkar was yet again unable to prove his worth, but Liton grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

This was a performance that has come on the back of a terrific domestic performance -- Liton was the highest run-getter in the Bangladesh Cricket League, scoring 779 runs in six games including a double hundred. He was also prolific in the Dhaka Premier League, scoring 537 runs in 10 games at an average of 59.66 for Prime Doleshwar.

Liton however was unable to score big during the two match Test series despite getting starts and also in the first two T20Is where he scored 24 and one but the right hander will surely gain some confidence after his maiden fifty in the white-ball cricket. And if he can continue in this vein, it may also solve a long-standing problem.

### BD-WI SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH		R/B	4s/6s	WEST INDIES		R/B	4s/6s
Liton c Nurse b Williams	61/32	6/3		Walton c Sabbarwal b Soumya	19/19	3/0	
Tamim c Williams							
b Brathwaite	21/13	3/1					
Soumya c Powell b Paul	5/4	1/0					
Mushfiqur c Ramdin							
b Brathwaite	12/14	1/0					
Shakib c Nurse b Paul	24/22	2/0					
Mahmudullah not out	32/20	4/1					
Ariful not out	18/16	1/0					
Extras: (lb-4, nb-1, w-6)		11					
Total: (For 5 wickets in 20 overs)	184						
Did not bat: Nazmul, Hider, Rubel, Mustafizur.							
Fall of wickets: 1-61, 2-66, 3-97, 4-102, 5-146.							
Bowler		O	M	R	W	Player-of-the-match: Liton Das.	
Hider	3	0	27	1		Player-of-the-series: Shakib Al Hasan.	
Rubel	4	0	28	1			
Mustafizur	3.1	0	31	3			
Nurse	3	0	31	0			
Badree	3	0	23	0			
Russell	3	0	36	0			
Brathwaite	4	0	32	2			
Paul	3	0	26	2			
Williams	4	0	32	1			
Fletcher c Nazmul b Mustafizur	6/7	0/0					
Samuels b Shakib	2/7	0/0					
Powell c Hider b Mustafizur	23/20	2/0					
Ramdin b Rubel	21/18	1/1					
Russell c Ariful b Mustafizur	47/21	1/6					
Brathwaite c sub (Sabbarwal)							
b Hider	5/10	0/0					
Nurse not out	0/1	0/0					
Extras: (b-4, lb-3, w-5)		12					
Total: (For 7 wickets in 17.1 overs)	135						
Did not bat: Paul, Williams, Badree.							
Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-30, 3-32, 4-77, 5-96, 6-128, 7-135.							