



India opener Shikhar Dhawan spreads his arms wide open to celebrate his century against Hong Kong in the Asia Cup at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Tigers' coach sees opportunity in crisis

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

Bangladesh's Asia Cup started in the best possible fashion on Saturday, riding on Mushfiqur Rahim's brilliance and Tamim Iqbal's heroism to register a rousing 137-run win over Sri Lanka. As that euphoria -- it was not just the margin of victory but the character shown in order to recover from a precarious situation -- may now be dissipating as the Bangladesh camp ponder the enormity of the challenge in front of them.

Tamim Iqbal, the opener who lit the spark for so many wins in the past, is out of the tournament and now in Dhaka nursing a fractured left hand suffered during the opener. Mushfiqur, who hit a career-best 144 on Saturday, is struggling with a rib injury. Even their likely finish as group champions may count against Bangladesh as that would mean playing three matches in four days starting with their last group encounter against Afghanistan, who knocked Sri Lanka out of the event on Monday. In heat they have never before experienced as a team before this tournament, those combined factors spell a warning for Bangladesh and the Tigers may heed it, with optimistic new coach Steve Rhodes seeing it as an opportunity instead of a setback.

"We haven't sat down to finalise things for Afghanistan. It's quite a hectic schedule, there is a lot of cricket to play in a very short space of time in very tough conditions," said Rhodes at the team hotel yesterday when asked whether he was mulling any changes

for the Afghanistan game, which has become an academic affair with Sri Lanka's unexpected exit. "So that might be necessary but the bottom line is that every single one of those games in ODIs is important and we want to win."

"But that might mean winning with different players as well. Bringing players in, resting an odd player here and there. It would be great exposure for the other guys and that what we will try to do. Bringing an odd player here and there but most of all we want to win."

One of the changes mulled is resting Mushfiqur for the Afghanistan game and giving him time to recover for the next day's match. Mominul Haque, included in the squad for just such an eventuality, may be in line to replace someone in the top order. It is also likely that the uncapped Nazmul Hassan Shanto will come in for Tamim.

"We have two batsman in reserve and Ariful [Haque] as well, who bats too. So we are in a good position," Rhodes said. "We have the likes of Mominul and we've got Shanto who could fill the shoes of Tamim there. Big shoes to fill but good prospects both of them."

"I won't ask them to bat like he bats [Tamim] I'll ask them to bat the way they bat, whether it's Shanto or Mini [Mominul]. It's great to get off to a good start but what's more important is that middle period, if you lose wickets in that period then it really does hurt. For them to get the target they aimed for [on Saturday] was really a freakish and fantastic innings from Mushy," added Rhodes.



STEVE RHODES

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Battle Royale returns to the desert

SPORTS REPORTER

India and Pakistan will return to the ring of their most famous bouts after 12 years as the archrivals face off in the Asia Cup in Dubai today.

The last time they faced off in the deserts of the UAE was in April 2006 during a two-match ODI series. Pakistan had won the first ODI by six wickets but then suffered a 51-run loss.

If we are to go by more recent form, then the last time they met was over a year ago in the Champions Trophy final, when Pakistan defeated a full-strength India by 180 runs.

This time around, with India having rested Virat Kohli and Pakistan playing in conditions they can consider home -- they have won 19 of the 26 games against India in the UAE -- it seems that the men in green have an even better chance of getting a win.

Pakistan also have the edge historically in head to head encounters, but recent history has seen India make inroads against their neighbours.

When it comes down to it, Pakistan versus India is neither a question of form nor recent results. Every match is entertaining and unpredictable and today should be no different.

India survive a scare

AFP, Dubai

India survived a scare against Hong Kong after Shikhar Dhawan's hundred as they battled to a 26-run win over the minnows in the Asia Cup on Tuesday.

Chasing a big 286-run target, Hong Kong gave their illustrious opponents a run for their money with an opening stand of 174 runs before collapsing to 259 for 8 in 50 overs.

India were lifted to 285 for 7 by a punishing 127 by Dhawan -- his 14th one-day international hundred -- and an attractive 60 by the recalled Ambati Rayudu at Dubai Stadium.

The Group A match was expected to be a one-sided affair, but Nizakat Khan scored a brilliant 115-ball 92 with 12 fours and a six, with skipper Anshuman Rath adding 73 to make India sweat for victory.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 285 for 7 in 50 overs (Sharma 23, Dhawan 127, Rayudu 60, Karthik 33, Jadhav 28 not out; Ehsan 2-65, Shah 3-39)

HONG KONG: 259 for 8 in 50 overs (Nizakat 92, Anshuman 73, Ehsan 22; Ahmed 3-48, Chahal 3-46, Yadav 2-42)

Result: India won by 26 runs.

Chance for youngsters: Tamim

SPORTS REPORTER

Tamim Iqbal's career has been dogged by injuries for a long time. The left-hander had to return home after suffering a thigh injury after the first Test in South Africa last year. After that, he suffered a knee injury despite which he took part in the Nidahas Trophy in Sri Lanka in March this year. The last injury, to his bicep, forced the southpaw to miss the first T20I against Sri Lanka earlier this year.

Now, Bangladesh have once again been dealt a huge blow as the opener fractured his wrist during the first game of the Asia Cup against Sri Lanka and was ruled out of the rest of the tournament.

The national team has had a long-standing problem in their search for someone to open the innings alongside Tamim and it has proven to be one of the biggest concerns for the team management. Over the years, the 29-year-old has lifted his game to such a level that it is almost impossible to think of an opening pair for the Tigers without Tamim.

The highest run-getter for the Tigers across all the three formats has remained firm at one end while there have been several changes at the other due to inconsistency from anyone who was given an opportunity.

The Tigers' team management now face a huge challenge in the rest of the games of the Asia Cup without their most consistent and assured batsman.

The cricketer returned to Bangladesh yesterday and was questioned about his concerns regarding the opening slots. However, the left-hander was hopeful that whoever replaced him would look to give their best.

"I think cricket is such a game where no one stops for anyone. As I am not able to play, someone else will come in and try to the best of their abilities. I personally want to wish the best to whom-ever opens the innings and I am sure they will try to



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal speaks to media on his arrival at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

think about Bangladesh and the team and perform accordingly," Tamim told the media at the Hazrat Shahjalal International airport yesterday.

Liton Das, who opened alongside Tamim in the first game, is expected to be joined by another young left-hander, Nazmul Hossain. Tamim however looked at the positives and said that it would be a great opportunity for the youngsters to take responsibility.

"The positive side is that the juniors now have the opportunity to take responsibility. Normally I used to open the innings along with another player but now the juniors will open the innings, which is also a matter of responsibility and I am sure they will be able to learn from it. The remaining four-five matches are also opportunities for them to cement their place in the team," he said, adding that the absence of an individual should not affect the performance of the team.

Tamim also hoped that Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim, who also have injury concerns, would continue to perform.

The cricketer will have an x-ray after a week which will be followed by another x-ray in the second week and if his recovery goes well then there would be no need for surgery. However, Tamim added that it would be important to recover properly.

INFO-ZONE

INDIA V PAKISTAN

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
11	5	5	1	11	5	5	1

IN ALL ODIS

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
129	52	73	4	129	73	52	4

IN UAE

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
26	7	19	0	26	19	7	0

Last meeting in ODIs: London, June 18, 2017. Pakistan won by 180 runs in ICC Champions Trophy.

KEY PLAYERS

	MS Dhoni		Babar Azam
Average	51.25	Average	54.21
Innings	274	Innings	45
Runs	10046	Runs	2006
HS	183*	HS	125*
SR	88.13	SR	85.76
50s	67	50s	7
100s	10	100s	8

Five great India-Pakistan clashes

AFP, New Delhi

Sparks generally fly when India take on Pakistan at cricket, and Wednesday's Asia Cup clash in Dubai will be an emotionally charged fixture as always.

Five of the most memorable previous encounters, the first since Pakistan thrashed India by 180 runs in the Champions Trophy final in June 2017.

DARK DAY

On the same day the teams were playing a one-day match at Sialkot in Pakistan on October 31, 1984, the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her bodyguards in New Delhi.

Dilip Vengsarkar and Ravi Shastri were piling on runs for India when the news came. Pakistan's president Zia ul Haq



An AFP file photo shows India team celebrating their victory over Pakistan in the final of the World Twenty20 at the Wanderers Cricket Stadium in Johannesburg on September 24, 2007.

ordered the match stopped, and India's captain Sunil Gavaskar wanted the same.

PM'S XI

Imran Khan's best bowling figures of 6-14 were in a one-day international against India March 22, 1985, but for

the swashbuckling Pakistan fast bowler it was all in vain.

Khan ripped apart the Indian batting line-up at Sharjah in the UAE to send the opposition packing for 125. But Pakistan's own batting imploded, skittled for just 87.

Khan -- now Pakistani prime minister -- was still man of the match, however.

A SWORD FOR A SIX

The match that will always evoke the bitterest memories for India, and the sweetest ones for Pakistan, was on April 18, 1986, again an ODI in Sharjah.

With Pakistan needing four off the last ball to win, India's Chetan Sharma ran in and bowled a full toss -- which Javed Miandad swatted for six.

Miandad, who was presented with a golden sword, became a national hero, while Sharma faced barbs and insults on his return home.

TENDULKAR'S TEARS

A century from Sachin Tendulkar, India's most celebrated batsman, was usually a recipe for success in the 1990s and 2000s but not in the 1999 Test against Pakistan in Chennai.

Chasing 271 for victory, Tendulkar brought India close with a sparkling

136, but Pakistani off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq got him out and India eventually lost by 12 runs.

While a sporting Indian home crowd gave the Wasim Akram-led side a standing ovation, Tendulkar was heartbroken, weeping in the dressing room and refusing to come out to receive his man of the match award.

MISBAH'S MISHIT

An India-Pakistan final in the inaugural T20 World Cup and a sell-out crowd in Johannesburg in 2007 was a perfect setting for cricket's newest format.

Pakistan's Misbahul Haq was on the cusp of taking his team to a memorable win with his gritty batting in a chase of 158.

But then came a moment of madness as Haq tried to play an audacious paddle shot against pacesman Joginder Sharma in the final over and Mahendra Singh Dhoni's India celebrated like never before.