



AFGHANISTAN leg-spinner Rashid Khan (R) tormented Bangladesh both with the bat and ball in an Asia Cup dead rubber at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. Bangladesh lost the game by 136 runs. PHOTO: AFP

Can Tigers harness their emotions?

SPORTS REPORTER from Abu Dhabi

One characteristic of the Bangladesh team that most will agree upon is that they are an emotional bunch, and performance often depends on whether they harness the emotion or their passions rule them. When they take on India in the Asia Cup Super Four match in Dubai today, it would be hard to imagine that it will not be an emotional affair. Not only do Bangladesh-India matches have a heated recent heritage, but in this particular tournament all other teams would have an axe to grind against India.

Bangladesh's tournament started in emotional fashion with Tamim Iqbal coming out to bat at number 11 in the opener against Sri Lanka with a fractured left hand in order to prolong the innings. Tamim then headed home because of the injury -- a major setback that is bound to affect the Tigers mentally.

They then learned on Wednesday morning that the Asian Cricket Council had virtually named their group runners-up with one match to play, making yesterday's first of two-back-to-back matches (in extreme heat) against Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi largely irrelevant. The sneaking suspicion among players and officials is that it was all done to accommodate India, who wanted to play all their matches in Dubai.

Therefore, at 5:30pm Bangladesh time, they will take to a field that they probably

believe is not a level one. They will square off against an opponent against whom they will feel that they have a few wrongs to right. In March Bangladesh were denied their first tournament win by a last-ball six by India's Dinesh Karthik in the Nidahas Trophy in Colombo. In the 2016 World T20, the Tigers were one run away from knocking India out of the tournament but gave it away.

In the 2015 World Cup quarterfinal, they felt aggrieved when a catch off eventual centurion Rohit Sharma was disallowed because of a call of waist-high no ball.

Today, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Co will have to cope with scant recovery time to take on their mighty opponents. They will be boosted by the returns of batsman Mushfiqur Rahim and pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who were rested yesterday, which probably means that Mominul Haque and Abu Hider Rony will make way.

From India's perspective, Bangladesh are the team that embarrassed them and knocked them out of the first round of the 2007 World Cup. Bangladesh are also the team that reached another level by beating the financial powerhouses of cricket 2-1 in Bangladesh following the 2015 World Cup. India also has injury worries -- Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel and Shardul Thakur have all been ruled out -- so they will have some disadvantages too.

But Bangladesh's lack of rest before an important match may prove decisive, unless they overcome any siege mentality and channel their frustration.

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Commitment only for the players?

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

Not many could have pointed a finger at Bangladesh if they did not put their all into yesterday's match against Afghanistan. As has by now been well documented, the Asian Cricket Council's decision to announce the Super Four matches even before the group champions and runners-up of the two Asia Cup groups were determined has cast the ongoing tournament in a bad light. To cut a long story short, as per the original schedule, Group B qualifiers Bangladesh and Afghanistan had the disadvantage of having to play their last group match yesterday and, with no real recovery time, had to face up to the Group A qualifiers today.

own board president. The unusual -- and in terms of tournament structures as we have come to know them, dysfunctional -- move of naming the second-stage matches robbed yesterday's encounter of any relevance. The widespread impression among cricketers in Dubai -- both Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Pakistan skipper Sarfraz Ahmed have spoken out against it -- is that the move was done outside the rules. It is also widely thought that it was to benefit financial powerhouse India, who expressed a desire to play only in Dubai.

For yesterday's match, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mustafizur Rahman were left out with a view to keeping them primed for an actually relevant match against India today, but no one else was rested. That their disadvantageous and disheartening circumstances did not wipe away the desire to win was evident on the field yesterday in Mashrafe's smart captaincy. He bowled off a slightly

shorter run and employed eight bowlers, which had the dual effect of keeping them relatively fresh for today's game and not allowing the Afghans to settle.

But off the field, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan was a bundle of contradictions as he took questions about the ACC's move.

"We have already sought a written explanation," he told the media at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium yesterday. "But the basic thing is that the things being discussed here, we have no problem with. There was none before and there is none now."

Why, then, the request for a written explanation?

"There are no champions or runners-up. If it was the semifinals then that would be something else," he went on. "The best thing would be if we knew the fixtures after today's match."

Then, in the same breath: "But our problem [in the original sched-

ule] is that we do not know who we would play against tomorrow or where. If it was against India it would be in Dubai, in Abu Dhabi if against Pakistan. So, what would they do -- return to Abu Dhabi tomorrow after going to Dubai tonight? It was confusing for all teams, so they decided that after the match against Pakistan and Oman [India and Hong Kong], they would name the groups."

To Hassan, it seems that the ACC's move was at once worthy of explanation and prudent in terms of the tournament and simultaneously harmed and benefited Bangladesh. It was certainly at odds with the focus shown by the team. Moreover, it was at odds with Mashrafe's discontent the previous day and the president's words seemed to throw the captain under the bus.

Hassan is currently the executive committee member of the ACC and is set to become its president after the next AGM.

INFO-ZONE

BD vs IN

BANGLADESH				INDIA			
M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
12	1	11	0	12	11	1	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

BANGLADESH				INDIA			
M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
33	5	27	1	33	27	5	1

Last meeting in ODIs: Birmingham, June 15, 2017. India won by 9 wickets in Champions Trophy.

KEY PLAYERS

Player	Average	Runs	HS	SR	50s	100s
Mushfiqur Rahim	33.82	174	4972	144	77.88	29
Rohit Sharma	44.88	179	6823	264	87.46	35

Indian trio ruled out of Asia Cup

AFP, New Delhi

Three Indian cricketers including star all-rounder Hardik Pandya were Thursday ruled out of the Asia Cup with injuries dealing a blow to the side's chances in the 50-over tournament.

Pandya, 24, was suffering an acute lower back spasm during the game against arch-rivals Pakistan in Dubai on Wednesday. He will be replaced by Deepak Chahar.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who injured his left index finger, will be substituted by Ravindra Jadeja.

Siddhartha Kaul has been roped into the squad in place of right-arm pacer Shardul Thakur, who is nursing soreness in his hip and groin.

DESERT HAZE Spaceship in Abu Dhabi



SPORTS REPORTER from Abu Dhabi

The Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi does not look anything like a cricket stadium when viewed from miles away -- which you can do because there is not much but sand and low-lying buildings around it. It looks like a spaceship crashed into the desert. There is a curved structure like an upturned boat at the north end of the ground, which houses roughly one-fourth of its 20,000 capacity. The rest of the ground is open to the elements -- namely the punishing desert sun.

But Bangladeshi expatriates proved their Tiger-loving credentials once again yesterday -- the perception was that unlike in Dubai, Afghan fans would dominate in Abu Dhabi, but they were completely outnumbered by Bangladeshis.

For the cricketers there is no respite throughout the day as the location of the big stand in the north means there is no shadow to cool down. At least in Dubai the stadium is cavernous, putting half the ground in shadow by the time of the 20th over. Sheikh Zayed Stadium, with its grass banks, would be more at home in England or New Zealand. The alien spaceship concept seems quite appropriate upon further thought. It's as if the architect thought:

"Only unstable people would play cricket in the desert, so here, have all the sun you want."

NO CLOUD OVERHEAD OR EARTH UNDERFOOT

Eight days into the tour to cover the Asia Cup, coming from the cloud-shaded Bangladesh, the UAE seems an alien world. There has not been a single cloud seen above. It would be an exaggeration to say that there is only sand and not earth underfoot, but let's just say the only non-sand ground seen so far are those artificially installed in sports grounds.

The heat informs every action in Dubai. Taxi drivers have the tendency to start driving before the last passenger has boarded and had a chance to close the door. It has happened so many times that the only explanation could be that, having sat in their air-conditioned comfort so long, once the blast furnace opens, they cannot help but drive off like a dog with a burning stick tied to its tail.

Cricketers start their days and end them late, emerging in the hotel lobby at around 11:00am, if they have afternoon practice -- which they dread for obvious reasons. In that they follow the locals -- if not for the expensive cars plying the road, Dubai in daytime would appear to be a ghost town.

Hasan ton lights up Day Two

SPORTS REPORTER

Wicketkeeper batsman Nurul Hasan slammed a hundred on the second day of the four-day practice match between two High Performance Squads at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna.

The underprepared outfield became a cause of concern for the players as the second day's official scorecard read: "the match ST (started): delayed due to unreasonable ground and rain."

The last session of the first day's play was called off due to a poor outfield after BCB Green scored 177 for six with Hasan at the crease on 28.

Play only resumed on the second day at 1.30pm and Hasan was the star performer with an unbeaten 138-ball 101 that contained eight fours and four sixes as Green declared their innings for 289 for nine in 78 overs.

Imrul Kayes opened the innings for the Green team and scored a 93-ball 58 to lay the platform while Mehedi Hasan scored a 38-ball 31.

Spinner Al-Amin claimed four wickets for 38 runs while pace Abu Jayed took two wickets for 45 runs.

Before stumps were drawn for the day, BCB Red scored 46 for one in 18 overs. Soumya Sarkar was batting on 21 and Al-Amin for naught.

MOMENTS

HIDER'S AUSPICIOUS ARRIVAL

Bangladesh's injury concerns and unfortunate scheduling in the Asia Cup combined to provide a debut for left-arm pacer Abu Hider, who had shown in recent T20Is that he was up for a fight. He needed that fighting spirit very early against Afghanistan. In his first over, the second of the innings, Ismatullah Janat hammered his second ball for four through point and his third for another boundary with a pick-up shot over square leg.

It did not faze Hider. He bowled the next ball on a length outside off and got some extra bounce, resulting in an uppish push to cover that Mohammad Mithun caught to give the debutant his first wicket. In the sixth over, he showed his ability to swing the ball and found a massive gap in Rahmat Shah's bat and pad, bowling him from around the wicket. Joy continued for Hider as he had a hand in the third wicket too.

Mohammad Shahzad advanced to Shakib Al Hasan in the 20th over and tonked him down to long off, where Hider leapt up and completed a spectacular two-handed take that provided a wicket and averted a six.

SHAHZAD NOT RUNNING

Shahzad is a portly batsman who uses hand-eye coordination and outrageous shots to earn his keep. Running is not his forte. Running in the Abu Dhabi heat even less so. In the fifth ball of the fifth over, Rahmat drove Rubel straight down the ground and ran hard. Shahzad however seemed to want to believe that the ball would make it to the fence, so he stopped running at least twice in the process of completing three runs. Rahmat could have completed five if he had a willing partner; four without a problem. At the end of the over he had a laugh at his colleague. The emotion probably changed when, because of the run not taken, he was on strike in the next over and Hider worked him over in five balls.

MASH CAN'T STOP

A survivor of seven knee operations and a 34-year-old senior statesman, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza often dives across after the delivery to stop straight drives -- an onerous imposition on his knees, much to the consternation of his teammates, especially as the ball would have been stopped at mid on or mid off. He privately says that he can't help it. Yesterday, in the 18th over, he dove to stop a straight drive from Hashmatullah Shahidi, but this time he almost ran out the portly Shahzad, who was backing up too far. Instead of consternation, it only drew admiring mirth from his teammates.



BD-AFG SCOREBOARD

AFGHANISTAN	R/B	4s/6s		
Shahzad c Hider b Shakib	37/47	4/0		
Ihsanullah c Mithun b Hider	8/4	2/0		
Rahmat b Hider	10/17	1/0		
Shahidi c Liton b Rubel	58/92	3/0		
Asghar b Shakib	8/16	0/0		
Samuillab b Shakib	18/31	1/0		
Nabi lbw b Shakib	10/24	0/0		
Gulbadin not out	42/38	5/0		
Rashid not out	57/32	8/1		
Extras: (b-5, nb-1, w-1)		7		
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs)	255			
Did not bat: Aftab Alam, Mujeeb Ur Rahman.				
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-28, 3-79, 4-101, 5-139, 6-150, 7-160.				
BOWLER	O	M	R	W
Rubel	6	1	32	1
Hider	9	1	50	2
Mehedy	8	0	21	0
Mashrafe	8	0	67	0
Shakib	10	1	42	4
Mosaddek	4	0	18	0
Mominul	3	0	15	0
Mahmudullah	2	0	5	0
BANGLADESH	R/B	4s/6s		
Liton lbw b Aftab Alam	6/14	0/0		
Nazmul c Aftab b Mujeeb	7/13	0/0		
Shakib lbw b Rashid	32/55	0/0		
Mominul c Shahzad b Gulbadin	2/17	0/0		
Mithun b Gulbadin	9/7	0/0		
Mahmudullah b Rashid	27/54	2/0		
Mosaddek not out	26/60	3/0		
Mehedy c Shahidi b Rahmat	4/10	0/0		
Mashrafe c Aftab b Nabi	0/11	0/0		
Abu Hider run out	1/11	0/0		
Rubel lbw b Mujeeb	0/1	0/0		
Extras: (w-5)		5		
Total: (All out in 42.1 overs)	119			
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-17, 3-39, 4-43, 5-79, 6-90, 7-100, 8-110, 9-119, 10-119				
BOWLER	O	M	R	W
Alam	5	1	11	1
Mujeeb	8.1	1	22	2
Naib	6	0	30	2
Nabi	10	1	24	1
Shinwari	2	0	12	0
Rashid	9	3	13	2
Shah	2	1	7	1
Result: Afghanistan won by 136 runs				
Player-of-the-match: Rashid Khan				