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DHA WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 26, 2018, ASHWIN 11, 1425 BS

**FIGHT FOR
ASIAN SUPREMACY**



Can Tigers find a way again?

SAKEB SUBHAN from Dubai



The Asia Cup so far has been an exercise in making lemonade out of lemons for Bangladesh. From the first match, during which opener Tamim Iqbal was felled by a fractured left hand because of which he eventually had to leave the tournament, Bangladesh have had to deal with the heat in the UAE, which the country's cricketers have not experienced since the 1995 Asia Cup, and



tough scheduling.

However, they have had to make it work, which they did in two of four matches so far, landing them in a virtual semifinal today against Pakistan at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu

Dhabi.

Tamim's exit was followed by heavy defeats to Afghanistan, where they crumbled to scores of 119 and 173 all out respectively. On Sunday, in a thrilling three-run win over Afghanistan, they played out the full 50 overs for the first time in the tournament. They had to shift resources, sending in opener Imrul Kayes, at number six to counter the leg-spin threat of Rashid Khan. Both wins -- the first being a 137-run win over Sri Lanka in the opening match, relied on two batsmen finding form and rescuing the team. In short, they are yet to click as a batting unit.

Bangladesh's highest score by the time two wickets had fallen in this Asia Cup is 18. While Pakistan have not had the best of times with the ball, it is known in cricketing circles that they retain the ability to strike at any moment, and against a vulnerable Bangladesh top order without Tamim may just be the occasion.

"They come with more challenges. There's a little bit more pace in some of their pace bowlers," Bangladesh head coach Steve Rhodes said after team practice at the ICC Academy in Dubai yesterday. "But the wicket in Abu Dhabi has tended to be on the slow side, so it's not necessarily favouring the really fast bowlers. It might make the ball come on to the bat nicely. It will be interesting to see whether their pace actually makes the wicket play well for our batsmen."

"These are the toughest conditions I have played in, you get tired after spending a little time on the field," said skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, a veteran of 17 years in international cricket.

"Riyad found it difficult to breathe after scoring 30-40 [on Sunday], you have to take singles and doubles and that tires you even more."

"One thing that you can do is score runs at the top and play for longer. Then the middle order have less time to spend out in the middle and can go for their shots. We can't just say that it is not possible, we have to try."

Although the head-to-head is stacked firmly in Pakistan's favour with Bangladesh winning four and losing 35, the Tigers won their last three matches in a memorable whitewash in Dhaka in 2015.

"The Pakistan team is now better than that one [Bangladesh beat in 2015]," Mashrafe said. "They did not have [pacer] Hasan Ali and [leg-spinner] Shadab Khan then. You can't judge them based on the match against India [which Pakistan lost by nine wickets on Sunday]. They are playing very well, but that does not mean we cannot play well."

"Pakistan, let's be honest, will be favourites in this contest," the coach said. "That puts us in a very nice position because they know we are a dangerous team and to go into that game as a slight underdog, we can really make that work for us."

"They are unpredictable. Let's hope they have an off day because if we play well, we are going to win. What we can control is what we do and how we play and the objective for our team is that we have a good day."

In the end, much will depend on whether Bangladesh can find a way to prevail once more.



While Mushfiqur Rahim is putting that extra effort in the nets, the presence of Soumya Sarkar (R) alongside pace bowling coach Courtney Walsh gives ample food for thought on the left-hander's introduction in Bangladesh's virtual Asia Cup semifinal against Pakistan today.

PHOTO: BCB

Feeling the heat, but up for the battle

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai



The heat is a dominant topic here in the UAE, and while it is true that the mercury is the same for all four remaining teams in the ongoing Asia Cup, Bangladesh would be justified in saying that they are the most disadvantaged. Afghanistan and Pakistan play 'home' games here regularly and India are the only team who has not had to travel between Dubai and Abu Dhabi to play matches, thereby increasing their recovery time.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, are playing here after 23 years. Given the travelling, the heat and the short recovery time, the squad have had to adjust their patterns -- training, resting and even sleeping -- in order to ensure that they are as fresh as possible for battle come match day.

"We ask them to sleep in," said trainer Mario Villavarayan after practice yesterday. "The Abu Dhabi game [against Afghanistan on Sunday] was the hottest. And then there was a two-hour bus ride to the hotel [in Dubai], so it's tough."

With a start time of 3:30pm, the journey from Abu Dhabi to Dubai

From Bangladesh to here, what we have changed a little bit is increase the amount of saline intake because you sweat a lot in 40-degree temperature. But still it is not easy, they are still having cramps. We have played three matches in four days. It is all a combination of sleep, hydration, ice baths, massages," Mario explained.

Yesterday was an optional training session for the Tigers with only Mominul Haque, Ariful Haque, Abu Hider, Mushfiqur Rahim and Soumya Sarkar -- who flew in on Saturday night -- opting to have a day out in the sun. Even training sessions are scaled down at times like these as Mario said that they just focused on doing the essentials.

"Even on rest days, we tell the players not to go out in the sun too much," Mario said. "They do some light gym work and that's all."

"It becomes a problem if you have your head down when you are struggling. As a coaching group we just need to be behind them and not let them be mentally and physically down. There are issues but we do not over-discuss it."

"But they are doing fine. And when they are up against one of the better teams in the world like Pakistan, they are up for the fight."

MARIO VILLAVARAYAN
BANGLADESH TRAINER

means that teams often reach their hotel after two in the morning. Pacer Mustafizur Rahman suffered from cramps and so did batsman Imrul Kayes during that match, and sitting in a cramped position for as long as the inter-city journey takes does not help matters.

"You start giving them hydrolytes and saline from the day before [a game], ice baths. It is all about hydrating yourself. That's the main thing in this kind of heat. From Bangladesh to

here, what we have changed a little bit is increase the amount of saline intake because you sweat a lot in 40-degree temperature. But still it is not easy, they are still having cramps. We have played three matches in four days. It is all a combination of sleep, hydration, ice baths, massages," Mario explained.

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INFO-ZONE

BANGLADESH V PAKISTAN

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
12	0	12	0	12	12	0	0

IN ALL ODIs

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
35	4	31	0	35	31	4	0

Last meeting in ODIs: Dhaka, April 22, 2015. Bangladesh won by eight wickets.

KEY PLAYERS



Shakib Al Hasan

34.91	Average	35.62
181	Innings	242
5482	Runs	7196
134*	HS	143
80.91	SR	81.97
39	50s	43
7	100s	9
Shakib Al Hasan	Bowling	156
244	Wickets	210
189	Innings	39.02
29.62	Average	4.64
4.46	Economy	0
01	5-wicket haul	4/19
5/47	Best Bowling	4/19

Shoaib Malik



Every game is a crucial one so today's match against Bangladesh will also be important. Now that the tournament is a knockout affair, when you lose to a team and are underperforming to boot, it brings a lot of negativity to the dressing room. We have had quite a few meetings to help put the defeats, such as the one against India, behind us. We also discussed what comes next and what needs to be done. Being a cricketer, I don't believe in underdogs or favourites. On any particular day, if you play well, you win.

IN-FORM PAKISTAN BATSMAN SHOAIB MALIK TOLD REPORTERS DURING THE PRE-MATCH PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY.

Doubt over Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's availability is in doubt ahead of today's virtual semifinal against Pakistan in the ongoing Asia Cup.

The world's top-ranked all-rounder is playing the tournament with a long-standing left little finger injury sustained in the tri-series final at home against Sri Lanka in January this year. His participation in the ongoing Asia Cup was in doubt until it was decided that he would possibly go for a surgery before the home series against Zimbabwe next month.

"Shakib is 50-50 right now; we cannot yet say what will happen," team manager Khaled Mahmud told The Daily Star yesterday. "We are working on the assumption that he will play, but we cannot say for sure yet."

Shakib went for a scan on his finger on Monday, which the team management called a routine check.

"He has been playing, so it's natural that the pain would increase," Mahmud said.

If Shakib does miss out, it would be a big blow to Bangladesh because talismanic opener Tamim Iqbal is already out of the Asia Cup with a fractured hand.

Tamim to consult specialist in England

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal is expected to travel to England on Thursday to consult a specialised doctor about his left hand's fractured index finger knuckle. The southpaw sustained the injury during the Asia Cup opener against Sri Lanka at the bowling of Suranga Lakmal and was subsequently ruled out of the tournament.

According to the Bangladesh Cricket Board's chief physician Debashish Chowdhury, the cricketer has already taken x-rays and the reports have already been sent to specialists in Australia and England.

"Tamim had his x-ray done and we have already sent that to England and Australia. We already received a response from England but we are still waiting for a response from Australia. At the moment we are sending him to England immediately to consult with doctor David, not for a surgery though as it will be better for the doctor to have a look at his injury in person," Debashish told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, Tamim informed that he still experiences some pain in the injured area and he hopes that surgery will not be required.

"Many may have thought that I injured my wrist but that's not true as I have fractured the knuckle on my left hand's index finger. What we are worried about is whether the bone is placing in the right area or not and it's slightly away from where it should have been. The doctors are thinking that if I do a surgery now then my joint may get stiff so they are trying to settle this without surgery and if there is any problem in future they will work accordingly. The fracture is very close to the joint so let's see if the doctors say anything new but I will continue in a conservative way."

"I have an appointment with the doctor in England on Friday and I am expected to travel day after tomorrow [Thursday] where the doctor will change the plaster and have a look at the injured area," Tamim told The Daily Star yesterday.



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Rashid, Shahzad star in epic tie

AFP, Dubai

Stockily built Mohammad Shahzad knocked a brilliant hundred as spirited Afghanistan pulled off a last over tie against India in the Asia Cup Super Four match in Dubai on Tuesday.

Shahzad's 124 laid the foundation of Afghanistan's fighting total of 252 for 8 in 50 overs before bowling out India in 49.5 overs for the same total.

Needing seven to win off the final Rashid Khan over, Ravindra Jadeja hit a boundary off the second ball before taking a single off the next. Last man Khaleel Ahmed then took a single but Jadeja holed out off the fifth to give Afghanistan a morale-boosting tie with the defending champions.

The winner of Wednesday's match between Pakistan and Bangladesh will meet India in the final in Dubai.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: 252 for 8 in 50 overs (Shahzad 124, Naib 15, Nabi 64, Najibullah 20, Rashid 12 not out; Jadeja 3 - 46, Yadav 2-38)

INDIA: 252 all out in 49.5 overs (Rahul 60, Rayudu 57, Karthik 44, Jadhav 19, Jadeja 25, Aftab 2-53, Nabi 2-40, Rashid 2-41)

Result: Match tied.

Player-of-the-match: Mohammad Shahzad.