

SPORT



Bangladesh's top-order, including Mushfiqur Rahim, will be vital if the Tigers are to get a series-equalling win against the West Indies in the second T20I in Mirpur today.
PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'We are ready to take the challenge'

SPORTS REPORTER



The strategy of tackling short balls by going on the counter-attack backfired for Bangladesh as they fell to an eight-wicket defeat against the West Indies in the first T20I in Sylhet.

Caribbean seamers Oshane Thomas and Sheldon Cottrell tested the Bangladeshi batsman with a short ball trap that led to the Tigers' downfall as the batsmen came out of their comfort zone and attempted to flex their muscles by going after short-pitched deliveries.

The intention to unsettle the visiting bowlers may have been right, but the application was wrong as such strategy requires much more than just a swing of the bat.

Soumya Sarkar was among the victims of that play as he attempted to pull a short ball from a Cottrell delivery that was coming onto his body, only to top-edge the

ball and be dismissed.

However the elegant left-hander backed that strategy to tackle short balls, saying that it was a courageous strategy before adding that Tigers required perhaps more perfection.

"Not a concern," Soumya told media yesterday in reply to being asked over tackling the Windies' strategy.

"We went chasing after the short balls, which requires courage. We tried to go hard even against the short balls and if we got dismissed by backing down then there would be a question of whether we were scared. If we had played cleverly and worked on timing and placement, things would have been good for us," he added.

"It would have been different if it was a Test match but in T20s you have to play the shots or else scoring options decrease."

Today's second game will be on a different pitch and under conditions dissimilar to those from the first T20I in Sylhet as the pitch in Mirpur has always remained unpredictable while offering a lot to seamers in overcast and gloomy conditions.

The Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium however has not been a very happy hunting ground for the Tigers when it comes to the shortest format of the game. Bangladesh have lost 13 of 20 games here while winning only seven.

Among their 14 T20Is this year, the Tigers have played just one in Mirpur, posting a total of 193 in a five-wicket loss against Sri Lanka in January.

Regardless of the pitch and conditions it will be important for Bangladesh to bank on their strengths, which has been a collective approach with the bat rather than looking towards power cricket. The result of the latter strategy is evidenced by the outcome of the first T20I.

"We are ready to take the challenge and since we are behind after losing the first game we will look to come back strongly. Even in the previous series we managed to come back after losing the first game. It will be important to chalk out the mistakes such as losing early wickets. Then things will go in our favour," Soumya concluded.



We have improved a lot and in the last few games we were not dismissed by short deliveries much. Normally, given the conditions we have here, we always play spinners. And suddenly when you face a quick bowler, you may face some problems in the early stages. But we have to adapt to that.

SOUMYA SARKAR
BANGLADESH BATSMAN

All cool on the Tigers' front

SPORTS REPORTER



Much like the weather, it was a rather calm and cool atmosphere at the home of cricket in Mirpur yesterday ahead of the second and crucial T20I encounter between Bangladesh and West Indies today.

Following an eight-wicket hammering in the first T20I in Sylhet, the Tigers seemed relaxed during training while their West Indies counterparts were more enthusiastic after registering a commanding win.

Other than the win, Caribbean T20I skipper Carlos Brathwaite, batsman Shimron Hetmyer and wicketkeeper-batsman Nicholas Pooran also had reason to be over the moon after Tuesday's Indian Premier League auction.

The three West Indians were roped in by Kolkata Knight Riders, Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kings XI

Punjab respectively for handsome sums in the auction.

That situation was in stark contrast to the scenario in the Bangladesh camp, from which both Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad, the only two Tigers in the IPL auction, remained unsold.

However the demeanour from the two senior members of the Bangladesh team remained as cool as the weather as they were busy preparing for the second game.

The one man who could perhaps have made things livelier and even warmer through his interactions with the media, T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan, only came to the ground for a short while before returning to the team hotel.

Shakib also did not attend the pre-match press conference ahead of the first T20I in Sylhet after picking up a knock to his toe in the nets. It was learned that Shakib was so angry

that he sent the Tigers head coach Steve Rhodes to interact with the media ahead of the first T20I in Sylhet.

That anger was also reflected by his comments about asking other batsmen why they did not perform in the post-match presentation and the fact that he received a fine and demerit point for arguing with umpires during the game.

The champion all-rounder yet again did not appear for the pre-match press conference yesterday, with Soumya Sarkar taking on the duties. However, this time it was not due to an unknown source of anger but because of a slight fever.

"It's not flu as there is no cough or cold. He [Shakib] has a slight temperature around 100 degrees and we are waiting for it to reduce. If it does not, he will take medicine," Bangladesh Cricket Board chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told reporters yesterday.



A buoyant West Indies will look to put behind the turmoil of the current tour, in which they have lost both the ODI and Test series, by winning the T20I series in the second match today.
PHOTO: STAR

Kohli slammed at home and abroad

AGENCIES, New Delhi



Indian captain Virat Kohli faced stiff criticism both Down Under and at home on Wednesday after his side's crushing loss to Australia in the second Test.

Former Australian paceman Mitchell Johnson called Kohli "disrespectful" and "silly" over his heated exchanges with fellow skipper Tim Paine during the Perth Test.

Former India great Sunil Gavaskar meanwhile hit out at "selection blunders" and the Indian Express daily slammed Kohli's "explicit lack of confidence" in some of his players.

Kohli and Paine exchanged barbs, at one point prompting intervention from the umpire, during the game that Australia won by 146 runs on Tuesday to level the four-match series 1-1.

It was reported that Kohli belittled Paine as just "a stand-in captain".

The retired Johnson said the famously combative Kohli's antics were unnecessary.

"At the end of the match, you should be able to look each other in the eyes, shake hands and say 'great contest'," he wrote in a column for Fox Sports.

"Virat Kohli could not do that with Tim Paine, shaking the Australian captain's hand but barely making eye contact with him. To

me, that is disrespectful.

"Kohli gets away with more than most cricketers simply because he is Virat Kohli and he gets placed on a pedestal but this Test left the Indian captain looking silly," he added.

Kohli did not mock Paine in sledge: BCCI

The Indian cricket board has taken the extraordinary step of issuing a statement denying Virat Kohli's alleged "stand-in captain" sledge at Tim Paine took place, in another sign pressure is mounting inside the visiting team's camp.

India's quest to win a historic first series on these shores is hitting major hurdles in the wake of their heavy loss in Perth.

The defeat has been compounded by the negative publicity generated by their captain's belligerent on-field behaviour, allegations of in-fighting and disharmony over team selection.

Only hours after Kohli had decreed that what happens on the field stays on the field, the Board of Cricket for Control in India (BCCI) slammed as "baseless" reports its captain had mocked Paine.

Meanwhile, Kohli has thrown his weight behind India's struggling openers but the tourists' defeat in Perth showed they have yet to find a solution to their top order woes.



India captain Virat Kohli (L) and his Australian counterpart Tim Paine shared a frosty handshake after the hosts won the second Test to equal the series in Perth on Tuesday.
PHOTO: AFP

North stutter but East start strong

SPORTS REPORTER

The fifth round of the Bangladesh Cricket League rolled onto the field on the second day after there was no play on the opening day due to rain.

However, due to a wet outfield only 31.4 overs were played at the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi where North Zone stumbled to 92 for five. Taskin Ahmed provided the early breakthrough by removing Mizanur Rahman for 19 and then took another important scalp, that of Sabbir Rahman.

Junaid Siddiqui looked settled before left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny dismissed the southpaw for 35. While North were losing wickets at regular intervals, Naeem Islam kept his cool at the other end during an unbeaten 70-ball 29.

At the Shahid Chandu Stadium in Bogura, Yasir Ali hit an unbeaten 70 as East Zone made a good start against South Zone.

Rony Talukdar and Imrul Kayes provided the platform with a 75-run stand for the opening wicket. However, the loss of three wickets within ten overs put East Zone in a spot of bother before a 103-run fourth-wicket partnership between Yasir and Mohammad Ashraful steadied the ship.

Ashraful scored 37 off 96 balls with four boundaries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

EAST ZONE V SOUTH ZONE
East Zone: First innings 204 for four in 67 overs (Rony 40, Imrul 37, Yasir 70 not out, Ashraful 37, Mahmudul 13 not out; Al-Amin 1-20, Razzak 1-56, Mahedi 2-47)

NORTH ZONE V CENTRAL ZONE
North Zone: First innings 92 for five in 31.4 overs (Mizanur 19, Junaid 35, Naeem 29 not out; Taskin 2-28, Shahidul 1-29, Arafat 1-21, Shuvagata 1-1)

Williamson praises SL duo

REUTERS, Wellington



New Zealand had tried everything to dislodge Kusal Mendis and Angelo Mathews on the fourth day of the drawn first Test at the Basin Reserve, said Kane Williamson on Wednesday, as the skipper paid tribute to the Sri Lanka pair's discipline and patience.

The match ended in a damp draw after only an hour of play was possible on the fifth and final day due to rain, with Sri Lanka on 287 for three in their second innings, still nine runs shy of New Zealand's mammoth first innings of 578.

Mendis and Mathews had saved their team from defeat on Tuesday when they took advantage of a placid wicket to bat the entire day. It was the first time in more than a decade that a wicket had not fallen on a complete day's play in Test cricket.

Williamson said he spoke to senior players to try to come up with an idea to break the partnership on the fourth day but nothing had worked.

"Everything we did yesterday didn't provide too many opportunities," he told reporters on

Wednesday after stating with a laugh that he might have changed "everything" if he could replay the fourth day again.

"We sat down and had a number of conversation ... and said 'what's something else we can try?'. "We tried pretty much all of it."

Mendis finished on 142 not out, while Mathews was on 120, having combined for a record 274-run partnership.

"There wasn't a lot happening," said Williamson. "We tried a few short balls and changes of tack and tried to build pressure for a period of time to buy a wicket to a certain extent."

Sri Lanka captain Dinesh Chandimal also acknowledged Mendis and Mathews had saved the game for his side, who were dominated by New Zealand over the first three days.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 282

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 578

SRI LANKA: Second innings 287 for 3 (Mendis 141 not out, Mathews 120 not out; Southee 2-52, Boult 1-62)

Result: Match drawn.

Player-of-the-match: Tom Latham.



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis (L) and Angelo Mathews walk off the field as rain starts during the final day of the first Test against New Zealand in Wellington yesterday. The defiant duo remained unbeaten after having come together near the end of the third day. PHOTO: AFP