

SPORT



Confidence Mash's magic mantra

MAZHAR UDDIN from Napier

"I'm telling you, we are going to win tomorrow [Wednesday]," a confident Tigers skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza told reporters while relaxing after a training session at McLean Park in Napier on the eve of the first match of the three-ODI series against New Zealand yesterday. It was not the first time and not just a fluke that Mashrafe said such words as he also said the same thing before the crucial ICC Champions Trophy game against New Zealand back in 2017 in Cardiff.

The rest is history as Cardiff became one of the most memorable venues for the Tigers as Bangladesh clinched a scintillating five-wicket win over the Kiwis after Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad struck hundreds to win the game from a near-impossible situation.

It is about self belief and confidence, both of which are strengths that made Mashrafe an inspirational leader and also the most successful captain for the Tigers.

Talking about imparting confidence, there were many instances yesterday when the 35-year-old was seen inspiring his charges. While talking to Liton Das after the training session, Mashrafe was overheard saying to the batsman: "The way you struck a hundred against India in the final of the Asia Cup, the situation will be exactly the same tomorrow [to-



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal (2nd from R) and wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim take a break during their sole training session in Napier ahead of today's first ODI against New Zealand at McLean Park.

PHOTO: MAZHAR UDDIN

day]. When you face Trent Boult, heed my words, the ball will only shape in towards you and you know how to handle it. You have faced Jasprit Bumrah and

Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who are more deadly than what you are going to face tomorrow."

The newly elected member of parliament

spent less time at the nets and spoke more to his teammates yesterday. The chief reason behind the pep talk was the absence of their most crucial mem-

ber, Shakib Al Hasan, who was ruled out at the last moment due to a finger injury sustained in the Bangladesh Premier League final on February 8.

Another reason for which the Tigers required mental strength is the fact that Bangladesh have never won an international game against New Zealand in their own backyard and on perhaps his last bilateral series away from home, Mashrafe is understandably desperate to correct the record.

Even with the team lacking in some aspects, such as the absence of a wrist-spinner, Mashrafe was eager to get the most of the resources he had as he was encouraging Sabbir Rahman while the batsman was bowling his leg-spinners in the nets and it will not be a surprise if the cricketer bowls a few overs today against the Kiwis in the first ODI.

"India has two wrist-spinners and places where most teams struggle like Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, they have managed to win series because of their wrist-spinners. We don't have any wrist-spinner and we don't take them [New Zealand] lightly just because they lost their previous series to India. As we don't have a wrist-spinner, we will try to give our best within our limitations," Mashrafe told reporters yesterday.

Even without Shakib in the side, Mashrafe at times seemed annoyed at any lack of confidence in the absence of the champion all-rounder as his main motto remained: "We are here to win;



I don't know about the whole [series] but certainly for the start of the ODIs, he [Shakib Al Hasan] won't be available. Big blow for us because there aren't many Shakibs in the world. Playing spin and against spin is one of our main strengths. I don't anticipate too much turn on these wickets. It will bounce and carry and wrist-spinners will get a bit of grip out of it. They know we have lost our best player, so maybe they will make some spinning wickets for us.

STEVE RHODES
BANGLADESH COACH



FROM THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

A broken bat and a fond hope

SPORTS REPORTER from Napier

For any batsman, it's the bat that is the piece of equipment they value most and look after meticulously. During yesterday's net session, Mehedi Hasan Miraz was batting and played a cover drive off a local net bowler. Oblivious of the fact that the toe end of the bat was broken and a piece of willow had gone clean out of the net, Mehedi was preparing to face the next ball with a broken bat. It was Rubel Hossain, who was sitting outside the nets, shouted out to Mehedi and said: "Are you going to keep batting with a broken bat or do you want it to be fully damaged?"

Mehedi finally realised that his bat was broken and looked pretty disappointed. Senior batsman Mahmudullah Riyad tried to console Miraz and said: "I understand how it feels when your bat is broken; don't worry, you will get a new one soon."

A dejected Mehedi was however still in shock and finally changed his bat and continued batting.

TAMIM'S TON TARGET

It took 27 innings for Tamim Iqbal to strike his maiden ODI century against Ireland back in 2008 and it took another 33 innings to smash his second hundred. The 29-year-old, who has lifted his game to the next level over the past few years, now holds the record for the most hundreds by a Bangladeshi across all formats. But the dashing left-hander, who just finished his batting session at the nets yesterday, was sharing his disappointment of not yet having scored a hundred in New Zealand.

"I have never scored a hundred in New Zealand -- I was dismissed in the 60s and 70s against them," Tamim said. When told that he should score a hundred here this time he said: "Yes, you are right. I should score a hundred in New Zealand. Let's see, you never know, maybe this time InshaAllah."

It's going to be a tough series as Bangladesh are a quality side as they have showed us a couple of years ago when they beat us in the Champions Trophy. We are hoping and pretty confident that we can make a good start and put our front foot forward. Obviously, Shakib is a world-class player and he plays a lot of cricket, but injuries happen in cricket and it's an unfortunate time for him. But he gets a break for now and potentially, he will be back later in the series.

MARTIN GUPTILL
NEW ZEALAND OPENER

Loving cricket with all other senses

MAZHAR UDDIN from Napier

In the middle of the Bangladesh team's training session at Nelson Park in Napier yesterday, two locals came up and sat just outside the fence to observe the players.

Before long it became evident that both were blind but their love for cricket was visible through their body language as they eagerly tried to get a sense of the Tigers' activities.

Helen Wilson and Glein Erwin are actually two cricketers of the Hawks Bay Blind Sports Club in Napier. When they learned that New Zealand would play the first of three ODIs against Bangladesh at McLean Park today, they realised that there must be a mandatory practice session for the visitors ahead of the game and came to catch the action.

Helen, a big fan of Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, asked this reporter to introduce her to his favourite Bangladeshi player. "You know, I am also a bowler and I bowled two maiden overs on the trot in a recent game. I am a huge fan of Mashrafe and also a big cricket lover; I heard that he has undergone seven surgeries in his career so far and is still playing."

Helen then showed a scar on her feet, perhaps indicating that like Mashrafe she is also tough enough, before her favourite Tiger finally came to her and greeted her with a smile.

When Helen learned that Mashrafe was elected as a member of parliament recently, she reacted with awe. "I have never heard of any current international cricketer who is also



While the Tigers toiled in training at Nelson Park, two cricketers of the Hawks Bay Blind Sports Club in Napier, Helen Wilson and Glein Erwin, observed before (inset) Helen went on to meet Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, an idol of sorts for her.

PHOTO: STAR

a member of parliament at the same time. He must be a great leader both on and off the field and it's fantastic," Helen said.

Glein, who was quiet initially, then opened up and shared his knowledge of the Bangladeshi players. "I know two players from the Bangladesh team -- Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim -- and both are your best players, right? I think they [Bangladesh] have the ability to play well and even win a game

here against us," said Glein.

The duo may have felt that they were fortunate to be close to some international cricketers, but it really was the rest of the people at the ground who were being treated to cricket's power to unite. Even for the two blind spectators, listening to the sweet sound of ball hitting bat and meeting their favourite Bangladesh players was enough to have a good day out.

Eng close in on consolation win

AFF, Gros Islet

Roston Chase provided some resistance with an unbeaten half-century but England remained well on course for a crushing victory over the West Indies at tea on the fourth day of the third and final Test at the Darren Sammy Stadium in St Lucia on Tuesday.

Set the improbable target of 485 after Joe Root declared his side's second innings at 361 for five following his dismissal for 122 after half-an-hour's play, the home team were tottering before lunch at ten for three courtesy of James Anderson but have recovered somewhat to reach the tea interval at 136 for six.

Chase, who came to the middle after a rampant Anderson had prised out Darren Bravo for his third wicket, batted through the afternoon session in reaching 53. He will have Kemar Roach as his partner when play resumes after the interval with England confident of mopping up the West Indies tail.

However the anticipation of a huge win will be tempered by the reality that it has come after suffering heavy defeats in the first two Tests, which gave the West Indies the series and possession of the Wisden Trophy for the first time in ten years. Chase and Shimron Hetmyer put



England pacer James Anderson (L) celebrates the dismissal of Kraigg Brathwaite during the fourth day of the third Test against West Indies at the Darren Sammy Cricket Ground in St Lucia on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

on 45 runs for the fifth wicket to provide a temporary halt to England's victory march after lunch until they undid all their good work when, on the stroke of the mid-session water break, Hetmyer

run out for 19 coming back for a third run as Joe Denly's throw from the cover boundary to wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow found the left-hander short of his ground. Moeen Ali then added Shane

Dowrich, caught by Ben Stokes at slip, to his tally of Test victims which now stands at 175.

Earlier, Anderson was at his destructive best in blowing away the West Indies top-order batting following Root's declaration.

Mark Wood, whose raw pace earned him his first five-wicket innings haul in Tests on day two, removed Shai Hope just before lunch in complementing the senior seamer's devastating early burst.

Anderson triggered the West Indies slide with just the third delivery of the innings when John Campbell, facing his first ball, sliced a booming drive to Ali at gully. Campbell's opening partner, Kraigg Brathwaite, seems doomed to suffer yet another defeat as stand-in captain and offered little resistance himself to Anderson when he prodded indecisively at a full-length delivery and Stokes held the catch at second slip.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 277 and second innings 361 for 5 decl (Jennings 23, Denly 69, Root 122, Buttler 56, Stokes 48 not out; Gabriel 2-95, Roach 1-45, Paul 1-11)

WEST INDIES: First innings 154 and second innings 136 for 6 (Chase 53 not out, Hetmyer 19, Dowrich 19; Anderson 3-27, Wood 1-27)

SA seek further dominance

First Test against SL starts today

REUTERS, Durban



South Africa will be expected to continue their recent dominance over touring sides when they host ailing Sri Lanka in a two-Test series starting at Kingsmead on Wednesday.

Their recent 3-0 sweep of Pakistan was South Africa's seventh successive home Test series victory, a run that included a triumph over number one ranked India and a 3-0 whitewash of the Sri Lankans on their last tour in the 2016/17 season.

Their supremacy has been built around a fierce fast-bowling attack and lively wickets, the opposite of the conditions they faced when they lost 2-0 in Sri Lanka last July.

Although the Kingsmead pitch is expected to be slower and take more turn than it has in the past. "Whichever team comes here we're pretty much going to try to dominate them," Proteas spinner Keshav Maharaj told reporters.

Sri Lanka have arrived in some disarray, having dropped experienced captain Dinesh Chandimal and with media reporting there are rifts between the board and coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who has been removed as an on-tour selector.

Whatever the nature of the wickets, Hathurusingha acknowledges that the series will depend on how his side handle South Africa's vaunted pace attack that includes Kagiso Rabada, Dale Steyn, Vernon Philander and Duanne Olivier.

"I'm relying on the players who have been with us. Dimuth Karunaratne is the captain, so he has to lead from the front," Hathurusingha told.

Pirojpur, Bandarban champs decided

SPORTS REPORTER

Pirojpur Government High School registered a 120-run win against Town High School to become champions of Pirojpur district in the Prime Bank Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bandarban Technical School and College rode on an unbeaten 80 from Ashraful Shohan to defeat Bandarban Government High School by five wickets and become champions of Bandarban district.

Sent in to bat, Pirojpur started brilliantly with opener Mirajul Islam adding 62. However, a batting collapse saw the side all out on 203 in 49.1 overs. In reply Town High were bundled out for a paltry 83 in 35.2 overs.

In the day's other game, Bandarban Technical chased down the 201-run target set by Bandarban Govt. High with five wickets to spare.