

SPORT



Will Shakib play?

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There is a question mark over Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's availability for the tri-nation series final against West Indies today after the left-hander was forced off the field with what appeared to be a side strain during the Tigers' last match against Ireland.

The all-rounder is a crucial part of the Bangladesh set-up and his potential loss was a matter of concern for the Tigers ahead of the final and with the World Cup just around the corner. Shakib's latest injury was the focus of the media attention as he only recently returned to the 'Tigers' set-up after a lengthy absence due to an injury he suffered during the Bangladesh Premier League final this year.

Early yesterday afternoon, chief selector Minhajul Abedin told The Daily Star that 'the injury does not seem to be serious', which is good news for the team and fans.

Team Physio Thilam Chandramohan's statement was more reserved: "Shakib sustained a left-sided back muscle spasm. He is undergoing assessment and treatment and we will make a decision regarding his availability for tomorrow's final on the morning of the match."

While there is cause for concern, when the team management was asked about Shakib's current injury situation, they were positive that the all-rounder's injury may not see him sit out the final.

"Unless it's as a precautionary measure, there is little chance that he will not appear in the final. Further assessment will be done before the match," the team management informed.

Given that the World Cup is imminent, unless Shakib feels that his World Cup participation might be at risk, he will likely play the final today against the Windies.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

While Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will surely be looking to put an end to the jinx of losing finals, the in-form Shai Hope (inset) of the West Indies could be a threat in the Tigers' way of securing a victory over the Caribbean side in Dublin today.

More than a trophy at stake

Tigers take on West Indies in final today

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Bangladesh have already proven that they are the superior side in the tri-series by winning three of their four matches convincingly, while the other against Ireland was washed out. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's troops were well-tuned and had decent performances with both bat and ball -- although the fielding was below-par -- and have already defeated the West Indies twice in the span of a week. So, they cannot expect anything other than a win against the same opponents in today's final at The Village in the coastal settlement of Malahide.

A win would be the perfect end to the series, dubbed a build-

up to the ICC World Cup, before the Tigers head to England with the 50-over megaevent just two weeks away.

They might have had good performances in the league matches, but they definitely did not get all the answers before the World Cup. When they take the field against the West Indies, Bangladesh will not only be searching for a confidence boost, but some answers as well.

A stable opening partnership is being sought after by the Bangladesh thinktank and Soumya Sarkar's two fluent knocks (73 and 54) have provided hopes ahead of the World Cup. On the other hand, Liton Das somewhat capitalised when he was given a chance against Ireland.

However, Soumya seemed

more assured than Liton, who seems to be troubled by the issue of how things should progress once a batsman settles and gets a start. So, chances are high that Soumya will be backed for the final and another good partnership with stalwart Tamim Iqbal would ensure that the team go to England with some relief.

It was also a good sign that the top order batsmen got some runs ahead of the final as there were concerns before the tri-series about whether the batsmen could acclimatise to the cold weather in Ireland.

It may not be wise to say that Bangladesh have solved the 300-run puzzle after chasing a nearly 300-run target against Ireland, but the batting unit has so far shown discipline although they are yet to face any big challenges

against their opponents.

The West Indies got off to a flying start in the tri-series with a massive 196-run win over the hosts, before Bangladesh brought them back to earth and their bowling unit undoubtedly played an important role in stopping the Calypso Kings.

Mustafizur Rahman's four-wicket haul after a below-par performance in the first match was an encouraging sign for the team but everybody will be looking forward to seeing him continue his form. Despite all his current limitations, Mashrafe once again proved himself as a leading pace bowler but there is hardly any doubt that others must come forward, just as Abu Jayed did in the last game, if Bangladesh want to do something at the World Cup.

And there is no way a team like Bangladesh can afford the luxury of dropped catches as they did in the previous game.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe rightly said after a six-wicket victory against Ireland on Wednesday that they would go to the final with lot of confidence after playing good cricket in the league stage. But a full-strength Bangladesh have to prove the point that they are not a team who break down in finals, especially when West Indies would not be too upset with the loss considering this is not their full-strength side; still be on the lookout for a player like Shai Hope, who is the leading run-getter in the series with two centuries and a half century, to spoil the Tigers party.



All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan lays on the ground after suffering a back muscle spasm during Bangladesh's encounter against hosts Ireland in the tri-nation series in Dublin on Wednesday. The injury might see the ace all-rounder sitting out the final against West Indies today.

PHOTO: AFP

ICC WORLD CUP 2019 BITES TO GO 13 DAYS TO GO

'I'm confident that I'll have another good tournament'

ICC

India opener Shikhar Dhawan has said that there is no secret behind his success in global ICC tournaments.

Dhawan has been India's top-scorer in all three 50-over ICC tournaments since making his India debut in 2013. That includes the ICC Champion Trophy that year, when Dhawan began his tournament with back-to-back centuries against South Africa and West Indies. At the start of that tournament, Dhawan had only been five ODIs old.

He finished the tournament with 363 runs -- not just the highest for India, but, by a distance, in the entire tournament, which India went on to win. He then struck 412 runs in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2015 and was the only Indian among the top five run-scorers of the tournament.

That was followed by another table-topping performance in the ICC Champions Trophy 2017, which India finished as the runners-up, where he scored 338 runs at 67.60, with a hundred and two fifties in five matches.

"People tell me about my record in ICC events, but frankly speaking, the intent has always been the same. It's not that the effort is less than 100% ever," Dhawan told Press Trust of India. "The focus, as always, is on the process. I am confident that I will have another good ICC tournament."

Ahead of the 2019 edition of cricket's 50-over marquee tournament, Dhawan has once again found some timely form. After a mediocre start to the year, he made a career-best 143 against Australia in the fourth game at home, in India's last ODI assignment before the World Cup.

He has followed that up with 521 runs in the 2019 Indian Premier League -- the highest for Delhi Capitals and the fourth-highest of the season. "My passion is still the same as it was when I started. I have shut out negativity, primarily because I am a happy-go-lucky person," he said. "Before I made my Test debut, I had played nearly nine years of first-class cricket. Had I not been passionate and hungry, I couldn't have performed for India after nine years of international cricket. Now, I have played six years of international cricket. It has been a great journey."



Seventh time lucky?

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The image of a dejected Shakib Al Hasan embracing Mushfiqur Rahim, who had broken into tears after a narrow two-run defeat against Pakistan in the final of Asia Cup in 2012 in Mirpur, will probably remain one of the most heart-breaking moments in Bangladesh cricket history.

It has been seven years since then and Bangladesh cricket has moved forward, adding a number of achievements to their belt. However, all the series win, ODI victories and even Test triumphs over the years could not fill one void -- winning a final of a major tournament. Till date, Bangladesh have made their way through to six tournament finals and, be it the ODI format or T20Is, the Tigers are yet to take the ultimate step.

in 2018 -- a year that saw the Tigers lose three tournament finals. Starting with a 79-run loss to Sri Lanka in January during a tri-nation series final, Bangladesh were left devastated by India twice later in the same year.

While it was Dinesh Karthik's unbeaten 8-ball 29-run cameo that snatched the Tigers' dreams away in the final of the Nidahas Trophy in Colombo in March, a rather pulsating

The curse of not winning finals seemed to have intensified

contest in Dubai saw Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's side again suffer the same fate -- a three-wicket defeat -- during the Asia Cup final in September.

Today, Bangladesh have the opportunity to lift the curse when they take the field against the West Indies in the final of the ongoing tri-nation series in Dublin. This can be considered the best chance for Bangladesh to change their frustrating finals record for a few reasons.

ODI				
TOURNAMENT	OPPOSITION	YEAR	RESULT	VENUE
Tri-nation	Sri Lanka	2009	Lost	Mirpur
Asia Cup	Pakistan	2012	Lost	Mirpur
Tri-nation	Sri Lanka	2018	Lost	Mirpur
Asia Cup	India	2018	Lost	Dubai

T20I				
TOURNAMENT	OPPOSITION	YEAR	RESULT	VENUE
Asia Cup	India	2016	Lost	Mirpur
Nidahas Trophy	India	2018	Lost	Colombo



The big five of (from L) Tamim Iqbal, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan need to lead the pack from the front today if Bangladesh are to lift the curse of losing finals at the seventh attempt.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

2-week camp in Bangkok for BD

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The Bangladesh indoor hockey team will prepare for two weeks in Thailand before taking part in Asian Indoor Hockey which is scheduled to take place in Thailand from July 15 to 21.

Newly elected Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) vice president Abdur Rashid Shikdar yesterday met with Thailand Hockey Federation president Chaiyapak Siriwat in Bangkok and sought his help in arranging a two-week camp for the Bangladesh team, which is going to take part in indoor hockey for the first time.

"Chiyapak Siriwat assured Abdur Rashid Shikdar of all types of training facilities, accommodation and local transport," read a statement from the BHF yesterday.

The camp is likely to start from July 1.

In another move, newly elected BHF general secretary AKM Mominul Haque Shaeed yesterday met Asian Hockey Federation chief executive Tayyeb Ikram at the AFH headquarters in Kuala Lumpur and expressed Bangladesh's interest to host the age-group Asian Cup and World Cup as well as the next Champions Trophy.

Shaeed also expressed interest in making Bangladesh a neutral venue for India-Pakistan matches, read a BHF media statement, adding that Tayyeb Ikram had promised to realise that in the future.

Bangladesh have already defeated the Caribbean side twice, that too with ease, this tournament and there seems no reason why Mashrafe's troops cannot do so again. Moreover, a West Indies side without the likes of Chris Gayle, Andre Russell, Evin Lewis and Carlos Brathwaite could be the perfect prey for the Tigers to pounce on.

Bangladesh came into this tournament considering it to be the lead up to the World Cup in the United Kingdom and this could be the best opportunity for the Tigers to break their losing streak in finals and take a massive boost of confidence into cricket's quadrennial event later this month.