



'An important chance to adjust'

Tigers' first WC warm-up against Pakistan today

SAKEB SUBHAN from Cardiff

Mehedi Hasan Miraz has only recently become a vital member of Bangladesh's ODI squad, with his off-spin often used to stifle the opposition's rate of scoring in the middle overs and also, at times, with the new ball. The effervescent 21-year-old proved his value in Bangladesh's recent triumph in the Ireland tri-series involving the hosts and West Indies.

Bangladesh's World Cup preparations will get underway in earnest today with



MEHEDI HASAN MIRAZ

a warm-up game at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff, and Mehedi will be expected to play a crucial role today and on Tuesday in their second warm-up against India as the Tigers seek a settled eleven to take into their World Cup opener against South Africa on June 2.

"We have around five [seven] days before the main match," Mehedi told reporters during practice at the venue yesterday. "I think the practice matches are very important because if it takes us two matches to get used to conditions here,

it will be easier if we can use the practice matches to adapt and adjust."

It may seem strange to many, but Bangladesh should start as favourites against Pakistan, a team they have beaten in all four encounters since the last World Cup in Australia in 2015.

The World Cup matches will be high-voltage and there will be a lot of pressure. If we can play our best and give our hundred per cent here, then the job will become easier over there [in the World Cup matches]," Mehedi said. "Obviously, we will get a lot of confidence if we can win the match. We will try to put forth our best and we will have to win the match, because then our confidence will be high."

Bangladesh's tri-nation triumph in Ireland is where Mehedi truly proved his worth to the team, even in conditions where spin bowlers are not expected to excel. In three matches played in Dublin, Mehedi bowled 24 overs and conceded just 101 runs on batting friendly wickets, while taking three wickets. His economy rate was the best among Bangladesh's specialist bowlers, and Mehedi said that is the way the team will want him to operate throughout the World Cup.

"I have always said that for spinners here, more than wicket-taking it is about containing runs and supporting the other bowlers. As spinners I think we have to support the pace bowlers. If I can save runs, then maybe wickets will come from the other end or if pressure is created, then there will be chances. That will be my aim, and that is what I have tried to do from the start -- to save runs and give as little away as possible in 10 overs."

Mehedi did not play much of a part in Bangladesh's 2017 Champions Trophy campaign when the Tigers reached their maiden semifinal, bowling just one over in the rained-off encounter against Australia. However, this time around, he will be expected to be a major player in the World Cup campaign, and it will all start with his performance today against Pakistan.

Can the rule of five help Tigers rule Sophia?

SPORTS REPORTER from Cardiff

On June 18, 2005, Aftab Ahmed smote Jason Gillespie for a canon-powered six over deep midwicket when seven were required off the last over, then calmly nudged a single to ensure that Bangladesh beat the mighty Australians by five wickets with four balls to spare.

On June 9, 2017, Mosaddek Hossain slashed a boundary to tie the bow on another famous win, which saw Bangladesh recover from 34 for four and chase down New Zealand's 265 with five wickets and 16 balls to spare and secure passage to a maiden Champions Trophy semifinal.

Both those encounters took place at the Sophia Gardens in Cardiff, Wales. The first one -- on the back of a sublime century by Mohammad Ashraful -- was one of the upsets

of the decade and till then, given Australia's strength at the stage, arguably Bangladesh's best result. The second one, just under 12 years later, was proof positive -- through twin tons by Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad -- that Bangladesh had the talent to beat the best even when their backs are against the wall and in conditions that may appear unfavourable.

Sophia Gardens is one of the few foreign venues where Bangladesh have a hundred per cent record and in that light it is fortunate for the Tigers that they are limbering up for the World Cup here. Ahead of their first World Cup game against South Africa at The Oval in London on June 2, Bangladesh will take on Pakistan here today in a World Cup warm-up before squaring off against India in their second warm-up at the same venue on Tuesday.

As the team train in Cardiff, they have among their midst the only man who was a

participating witness to both those triumphs, and that it has gone under the radar speaks to the qualities of ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. In both Cardiff triumphs, he played a crucial yet low-profile role -- conceding just 33 runs for the wicket of Adam Gilchrist in 2005 and bowling economically (10 overs for 45) in the win over New Zealand.

To stretch the narrative a bit into numerology, the Australian triumph was the fifth match hosted by the venue, and Bangladesh won both matches by five wickets. Also, after the two warm-ups, when Bangladesh take on hosts England here on June 8, it will be their fifth competitive match at the venue. Of course, Mashrafe would not be counting on the stars and numbers, but given how impossible it has seemed to beat the top-ranked hosts, the Tigers would probably take any inspiration they can get their paws on.



Australia batsman Steve Smith struck a blistering 102-ball 116 against England in a warm-up match ahead of the ICC Cricket World Cup at the Rose Bowl in Southampton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ton-up Smith sets up Aus win

AFP, Southampton

Steve Smith ignored the jeers of the crowd to mark his first match against England since a ball-tampering ban with a century that set up Australia's 12-run win in a World Cup warm-up clash at Southampton on Saturday.

Smith's 116 was the centerpiece of reigning world champions Australia's 297 for nine.

A target of 298 proved just beyond England, without four first-choice players including captain Eoin Morgan and fellow batsman Joe Root, as the World Cup hosts and favourites were dismissed for 285 with three balls left.

"I'm pretty chilled, everyone's entitled to their opinion," Smith told Sky Sports during the innings break when asked about the crowd's taunts.

"I'm just happy to be back playing. Fortunately, I was able to contribute today and hopefully I can take this form into the World Cup."

Warner was booed first by spectators on Saturday when he walked out to open the innings with captain Aaron Finch after Australia lost the toss.

England's reply saw James Vince, on his Hampshire home ground, make 64 and stand-in captain Jos Buttler a blistering 52. But both batsmen got out when well set.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 297 for 9 in 50 overs (Warner 43, Marsh 30, Smith 116, Khawaja 31, Carey 30; Plunkett 4-69)

ENGLAND: 285 all out in 49.3 overs (Vince 64, Buttler 52, Woakes 40, Roy 32; Behrendsen 2-43, Richardson 2-51)

Result: Australia won by 12 runs.

'Could be among the top four'

In the lead-up to the 2019 World Cup, we take a look back on World Cups past through the eyes of Bangladesh's former World Cup stars. Minhajul Abedin featured in the Tigers' inaugural World Cup campaign in 1999 but only after an uproar from supporters forced the selectors to change their initial decision to exclude him from the squad. Minhajul, currently the chief selector of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, shared some of his cherished World Cup memories and also discussed the Tigers' chances in the upcoming edition of the flagship event in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin.



The Daily Star (TDS): After three ICC Trophy defeats, finally Bangladesh won one in 1997 to qualify for the 1999 World Cup. Do you recall what it felt like when that period of struggle to ended?

Minhajul Abedin (MA): Obviously, it's the most memorable thing since we finally got a place in the World Cup. There were no such facilities and infrastructure for us at that time and despite all those shortcomings, we went on to win two games, which was remarkable. It helped us get Test status after and overall, I would say that among all the World Cups it was the most memorable one for us.

TDS: Initially, you excluded from the 1999 World Cup squad but you were eventually made a last minute inclusion. How did that feel?

MA: It was the biggest disappointment of my life, to not be included in the World Cup squad. Even though I scored runs in the triangular series ahead of the event, I was dropped. Still, I had hope that I would return to the team and sure enough, following the team's poor performance in the triangular series, I was recalled. Even after all that, I was able to perform, which was a big thing for me.

TDS: You were the player-of-the-match in Bangladesh's win against Scotland in the 1999 World Cup. Can you share some memories of that match?

MA: It is memorable because we managed to win the game after bouncing back from a very difficult situation. It was obviously a huge milestone for our country's cricket because if we had slipped in that game, our standing would go down again and we would have to work our way back up from the beginning.



From that point of view, I was very lucky to remain on the front lines and help my team to victory. It was one of the most memorable wins for us.

TDS: What did it mean to Bangladesh's first World Cup squad to feature in the quadrennial mega event? What was the team's reaction to beating Pakistan in that edition?

MA: We were supposed to qualify for the World Cup earlier through the 1990 ICC Trophy as we had one of our best team's at the time. Disappointingly though, we lost that tournament and the subsequent loss of the opportunity to play at the World Cup was even more so.

We didn't play well in the 1994 ICC Trophy either but we eventually won the 1997 edition. Our dream to play at the World Cup actually began from the 1990 ICC Trophy. We eventually got a taste of what it is like to play at the World Cup after another nine years and everyone was pumped up

to participate. Beating Pakistan in our maiden World Cup appearance was a huge thing. At that time, Pakistan had some of their all-time best cricketers on the side with the likes of Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and others. So obviously that win, which was a tremendous confidence boost, will always remain as one of the turning points of Bangladesh's cricket journey.

TDS: As the current chief selector, what do you think Bangladesh's chances are in the upcoming World Cup realistically?

MA: This team is, I think, one of the most experienced Bangladesh sides to take part in the World Cup so far. We have a few players who have played more than 100 matches and that a huge plus point for us. And it won't be unrealistic if we believe that this team have the ability to be among the top four teams of the tournament this time, and I am hopeful for it.

New Zealand thrash India

AFP, London



Trent Boult starred with the ball as New Zealand thrashed India in a World Cup warm-up match at The Oval on Saturday.

The left-arm seamer exploited overcast conditions and a pitch with plenty of grass cover to finish with four for 33 as India were skittled out for just 179 in 39.2 overs.

Ross Taylor (71) and New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (67) both spent useful time in the middle as the Black Caps won with almost 13 overs to spare.

Earlier, Boult removed openers Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan for two apiece to leave India 10 for two.

Ravindra Jadeja (54) and Hardik Pandya (30) were the only India batsmen to make it past 19.

India captain Virat Kohli fell for 18 to medium-pacer Colin de Grandhomme when the star batsman was cleanly bowled by a ball that cut back in off the seam as he aimed towards midwicket.

Kohli's men were in danger of being dismissed for under a hundred when MS Dhoni, the captain of the India side that won the 2011 World Cup, fell to Southee to leave his team on 91 for seven.

But Jadeja's 50-ball innings, featuring six fours and two sixes, helped rally the tail.

India, however, were still bowled out with nearly 10 overs of their innings remaining, with James Neesham taking three for 26.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 179 all out in 39.2 overs (Kohli 18, Pandya 30, Jadeja 54, Yadav 19; Boult 4-33, Neesham 3-26)

NEW ZEALAND: 180 for 4 in 37.1 overs (Guptill 22, Williamson 67, Taylor 71; Bumrah 1-2)

Result: New Zealand won by 6 wickets.



New Zealand bowler Trent Boult picked up four wickets for 33 runs to set up a six-wicket win over India in a warm-up match in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP