



They may be competitors for the same place in the playing eleven, but Bangladesh batsmen Mosaddek Hossain (L) and Sabbir Rahman's bonhomie shone through after one of the last opportunities to prove their worth, the World Cup warm-up game against Pakistan at the Swalec Stadium (Inset) in Cardiff, was washed out yesterday. PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

Competing duo look to India warm-up

SPORTS REPORTER from Cardiff



For most of the Bangladesh team, the World Cup warm-up game against Pakistan being washed out in Cardiff yesterday was not a big setback, but for two cricketers it was an opportunity missed to stake a claim for a spot in the playing eleven when the Tigers square off against South Africa in their World Cup opener on June 2.

It was a twist of fate that the team management decided to send those two players to the mixed media zone to have a few words with reporters soon after the match was abandoned. Mosaddek Hossain grabbed his place in the spotlight by hitting an unbeaten 24-ball 52 in the tri-series final against West Indies in Dublin on May 17, the day the Tigers won their maiden ODI multi-team trophy. In that rain-curtailed final, he performed the role that is expected of Sabbir Rahman, who after scoring his maiden international century in the third ODI in New Zealand did not get enough opportunities to prove his worth in Ireland.

"Today's match was important for me," Sabbir, who played a grand total of 10 balls over four matches in Ireland, said. "Now the next match [the second warm-up against India on Tuesday] is important. It is disappointing that the match did not take place, but the

team is in good shape, as am I. I am practising on wickets that are similar to the ones that the matches will be played on."

He could, however, not be drawn into commenting on the possible competition with Mosaddek. "I have always played in hard situations, taking up the challenge. This time too it won't be easy, but I will try to do what I must do and give my best. I always feel that it is my last match, and I try to give my all from that mindset."

Mosaddek, who was one of the surprise inclusions in the World Cup squad, said that it was not about competing with Sabbir.

"I am not thinking about it that way," he said. "I will try my best, but I don't want to come into the team because someone else did poorly. The Bangladesh team comes first. If I get my chance I will try to do well."

"We are coming off a good series in Ireland, so one match not taking place because of rain is not too disappointing. Today I didn't get the chance, but there is a match against India and in that game we will prepare well and head to the World Cup."

As things stand with Mahmudullah Riyad's shoulder injury, Mosaddek has as good a chance as Sabbir of making the cut in order to bowl a few useful overs of off-spin. "These conditions are difficult for spinners because there is not much turn on offer. But I will try to minimise runs and keep the batsmen in check."

Washout 'not a problem'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Cardiff



After two days of uninterrupted and fruitful practice sessions in Cardiff, the 15-member Bangladesh squad may feel aggrieved that the first of their two World Cup warm-up games was washed out without a ball being bowled at the Swalec Stadium yesterday. The practice game against Pakistan was an ideal opportunity for the Tigers to adjust to the climate and conditions in a competitive match situation.

However, head coach Steve Rhodes did not appear too bothered by a whole day's worth of preparation, not to mention match practice, go to waste ahead of their first World Cup match against South Africa at The Oval in London on June 2. The Tigers will have a second chance to warm-up for the mega event in Tuesday's practice game against India, also in Cardiff.

"It would be good to get some match cricket before we play South Africa in that first game. The good thing for us is that we are in a good position confidence-wise; we've played quite a bit of cricket recently, so we're ready at match intensity," said Rhodes soon after the match was called off due to a persistent drizzle at 2:00pm local time. "If the game against India is washed

out, I wouldn't panic."

A big part of the reason that the team is confident is that just before arriving in the United Kingdom, the Tigers won their maiden multi-team ODI trophy in Ireland. However, with even fringe players performing well in that series, there is the question of settling upon a playing eleven.

"It's not a problem because we know



STEVE RHODES

roughly what we want to do. We know roughly what 11 we may well be taking into the game against South Africa, but I won't be telling you," Rhodes said.

The other point of interest surrounding

the warm-ups is how well Shakib Al Hasan -- who suffered back spasms in Ireland -- and Mahmudullah Riyad, who has a preexisting shoulder injury that has prevented him from bowling his part-time but useful off-spin, have recovered.

"Not playing in the IPL gave him [Shakib] an opportunity to be fit. He had a little problem over in Ireland, but he seems to have gotten over that and is raring to go. He is looking forward to a wonderful tournament. I think he has got a bit of a point to prove. I think he thinks that as well -- seems to be a little bit forgotten, missing out on some IPL games. Now he is back as world number one all-rounder in ODIs, that's where we think he belongs. He has got a point to prove to make sure everybody else believes that."

"Mahmudullah and his shoulder, well that's a little slow. We were hoping that maybe he would have bowled in this game; I don't think that would have been possible," Rhodes said about Mahmudullah. "But we're very optimistic that we can get him up and running for the early stages of the World Cup. The good thing about Mahmudullah is that he is not a guy who needs a lot of practice to be any good at it. He seems to just roll his arm over and he lands it well."

SAKEB SUBHAN from Cardiff

Bangladesh's warm-up match against Pakistan in Cardiff's Swalec Stadium was an acute disappointment because a very light but persistent drizzle prevented play, and ended up causing an abandonment without a ball being bowled yesterday. Pakistani and Bangladeshi expatriates alike had come to the ground nestled in the middle of the wooded parkland known as Sophia Gardens, and it would be understandable if they were frustrated at the rare opportunity to see their cricketing heroes being thwarted by the weather.

Four or five Bangladeshis -- there were around a total of a hundred spectators on the gloomy day -- took it upon themselves to partake in some cricketing action. A lively, if short-lived (a safety steward put an end to proceedings within about half an hour), game of cricket took place beneath one of the stands with temporary participants joining in. But three expats were having the game of their lives under the scant shelter even as the real cricketers were confined to indoor practice.

The ball was a red tennis ball and the bat appeared to be one of those sold as souvenirs at the ground, still in its plastic wrapping. Bangladesh's Liton Das seemed a popular name, as one of the

WORLD CUP DIARY

Damp squib? It's what you make of it

participants repeatedly yelled out 'Shabash Liton' every time a ball was fielded successfully at what would have been a short cover.

At one stage, Pakistan batsman Imam-ul-Haq walked out of the nearby indoor nets and was making his way to the dressing room. As some Pakistani spectators -- some who had stationed themselves at midwicket for the impromptu cricket game -- rushed to take selfies with the bespectacled batsman, the Bangladeshis running the game were not interested in the least.

"He is not one of ours; doesn't concern us," said one of the main players to general laughter among his fellow expats.

Soon, however, Liton went through and that brought the game to a momentary halt as the participants scampered for selfies. Liton, however, was eager to get to net practice and the expats had to be content with a picture from afar.

Soon, Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur walked through and he noticed some of the big hits unleashed by the player batting at the time.

"Where are you going to be next Friday," Arthur asked with a chuckle, presumably talking about Pakistan's World Cup opener against West Indies.

"Too bad, mate, we are from Bangladesh," came the reply, and Arthur was on his way.

'Other teams are playing better'

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. **Mehrab Hossain**, became the first Bangladeshi player to score a century in a one-day international when he struck 101 runs against Zimbabwe. A month later, he featured in the Tigers' maiden ICC World Cup campaign in the United Kingdom in 1999 and became Bangladesh's first batsman to strike a 50 at the showpiece event. With this edition of the ICC World Cup knocking on the door, Mehrab took a look back on the golden days of Bangladesh cricket and his World Cup exploits in an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star's Nabid Yeasin**.



Shakib is the danger man: Ponting

AGENCIES, Sydney

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes that Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan will be the danger man to look out for in the Tigers' squad during the upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup in the United Kingdom.

Shakib, currently ranked as the world's number one ODI all-rounder by the ICC, has scored 5717 runs from the 198 matches he has played so far at an impressive average of 35.73. In addition, the southpaw has 249 wickets to his name.

According to two-time World Cup winner Ponting, Shakib could very well be key the side's success.

"My danger man for Bangladesh is Shakib Al Hasan," Ponting told cricket.com.au yesterday. "He has been here for a long time. He scores in many different areas, he is very strong in the square of the wicket and also strokes very well in backward point and the third man region."

Ponting, hailed as one of the best batsmen of all time, also praised Shakib for his shrewd bowling and guile.

"Shakib's cleverness comes out in his bowling. The left-arm off-spinner has never been a big turner of the ball, his changes of pace while bowling are quite



amazing and he looks to attack. He uses the arm ball a lot more than other spinners," Ponting said. "He is different from other spinners right now. Most spinners bowling don't give the batsmen any scoring opportunities. But he is the other way, he keeps you on the pitch for the first couple of balls, changes the pace and waits for the batsman to take him on."

"Shakib has been playing international cricket for a long time now, he also played in Indian Premier League and Big Bash League for a long time. His experience will come in handy for Bangladesh."



TIGERS' WORLD CUP STRIPES

The Daily Star (TDS): How did it feel to represent the country in their maiden ICC World Cup in 1999?

Mehrab Hossain (MH): A lot of emotions took over at that time since the World Cup is the absolute top-flight of cricket events in the world. Obviously there was excitement but at the same time, there was no fear at all for me regardless of which opponent we faced or any other aspect. Overall, I think I was in a trance as everything just happened. To be honest, I never set any target that I have to score a hundred in the World Cup. I just wanted to play my natural game and be confident.

TDS: What is your best World Cup memory?

MH: I struck a fifty against West Indies in that World Cup. I was lucky enough that it was also the first fifty hit by a Bangladeshi batsman at the World Cup too. I had planned before to somehow perform well against West Indies ahead of the World Cup as my father was a huge fan of theirs. He had told me 'son you must do well against West Indies'.

TDS: Any interesting World Cup incidents you would like to share?

MH: I remember one incident during the game against Pakistan, which we won. Wasim Akram



keep strong nerves. The environment of World Cup cricket is totally different. England is the birthplace of cricket and the World Cup being held in England itself is a huge thing. I think we have to play the type of cricket we normally do but at the same time we have to keep our nerves strong seeing as whoever is able to do so will likely enjoy more success.

TDS: As a former opener, who do you think would be the best opening partner for Tamim Iqbal?

MH: At the moment two of the best openers in the country are in the team. Soumya Sarkar is in very good touch and I think the type of wickets in England are perfect for Soumya to adapt. He likes to play on the rise shots as the wicket will offer true bounce there. Pitches in ICC tournaments have remained batting friendly over the past few years and so I think the combination of Soumya and Tamim will be good.

TDS: Realistically, what do you think Bangladesh's chances are in the upcoming World Cup?

MH: Well, expectations are sky high but I think we also need to be realistic. Considering the type of cricket we are playing at the moment, I think the other teams are playing even better cricket than us. To give a tough fight we have to click in all departments consistently, only then we can hope to reach the semifinals. However, if you want to reach the semifinals, you have to win a minimum of six games. It will be important for the senior players to work on their fitness since it's a long tournament and that could prove crucial for Bangladesh.