



Fizz back to the fore

SPORTS REPORTER from Cardiff



Mustafizur Rahman's performance with the ball is thought to be one of the major factors in deciding whether Bangladesh's World Cup campaign will be a happy one. In that light, despite being punished on the field yesterday in their only warm-up game against India at the Swalec Stadium in Cardiff yesterday, there will be one big positive to take into their World Cup opener against South Africa at the Oval on June 2.

In an opening spell that cost just 19 runs and produced the wicket of India opener Shikhar Dhawan, Mustafizur showed none of the rust that was in evidence even in the preceding tri-series in Ireland, which he started by conceding 80-plus runs against West Indies.

There were two things that stood out yesterday -- that he excelled as a conventional new-ball bowler and that he was consistently clocking upwards of 135 kmph, which makes the slower cutters that he is known for all the more venomous. His bowling brain was also working well -- he outfoxed Dhawan with two outswingers, followed by two inswingers and just when the left-hander was expecting an away-swing, another inswinger caught him plumb front. He also continued to be the only Bangladesh bowler who uses the bouncer to good effect, such as when he surprised Virat Kohli in the ninth over when he was getting too comfortable coming forward.

It was not perfect from Mustafizur; he did overuse the short delivery and was tonked for two sixes by KL Rahul near the end, but it will be a big problem solved for Bangladesh if the Fizz can carry on in this vein.

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman seems to have shaken off the rust which was evident not too long ago in the recently concluded tri-series in Ireland. The left-arm quick produced a wily opening spell, claiming the wicket of India opener Shikhar Dhawan in the final warm-up match between the sides in Cardiff yesterday, raising hopes of an in-form Fizz ahead of the World Cup proper.

PHOTO: BCB

'An opportunity to explore ideas'

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There was not much reason for Bangladesh to be too downcast about the 95-run loss to India in the Tigers' last warm-up game in Cardiff yesterday, before taking on South Africa in their World Cup opener next Sunday. Bangladesh are already primed for action, having won their maiden multi-team ODI trophy in Ireland as recently as May 17.

Spin bowling consultant Sunil Joshi hinted that the practice match was about seeing how the bowlers stacked up against India's batsmen in different situations. There was evidence of that in Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's bowling changes, such as not introducing spin till the 25th over and making part-time leg-spinner Sabbir Rahman bowl three overs in the last 10 overs.

"Definitely, considering that this is a practice game, we need to know how our bowlers shape up against different batsmen in different contexts, in the Powerplays and at the end as well," said Joshi during the post-match press conference. He however would not go so far as to say that Bangladesh were not playing for a win.

"It's not that way, although it's a friendly game. When you look at the start we got, they were 100 for four," he said, before again hinting that the captain's choices seemed to prioritise experimentation. "The opportunity was with us -- if Shakib [Al Hasan] could have bowled a few more overs it would have been a tighter game, Rubel [Hossain] bowled well to Mahi [MS Dhoni] and KL Rahul. That was a period when they were looking to play slowly. It's an opportunity for our bowlers to bowl at different stages, to see how they can shape up."

He was asked whether it was tough for the players to prepare for a practice game after already having played at high intensity in Ireland less than two weeks ago, and Joshi seemed to believe that the lion's share of preparation was done in Ireland.

"I think we had a good triangular series in Ireland. The conditions were ideal for us to prepare to come for the World Cup. Of course, the first [warm-up] game we didn't get because it was rained off. And again, playing against India is always an opportunity for our players to see how they can bat against Indian bowlers and where our bowlers can bowl at different stages of the game. So it was an opportunity to explore ideas."

Lessons from the warm-up

SAKEB SUBHAN from Cardiff



A win or loss in a practice match is not as important as taking on board what it says about the team in its current state. Therefore, it is not cause for hand-wringing that Bangladesh conceded 359 for seven after at one stage having India on 88 for three in 20 overs with Virat Kohli back in the hut in their final World Cup warm-up at the Swalec Stadium in Cardiff yesterday. By the same token, if Bangladesh had gotten their mighty neighbours all out for 160, there should not have been wild celebrations.

With Bangladesh set to open their World Cup campaign at The Oval against South Africa on June 2, and with the wickets across the event expected to be flat batting tracks, there were lessons to be taken from their bowling performance yesterday.

Fizz an asset with the new ball Mustafizur Rahman has not often been given the new ball as he is more valued for his slower cutters that prove economical in the middle overs and incisive in the death overs. However, he made a strong case for being Bangladesh's go-to opening bowler in the World Cup. There will always be movement on offer with the new ball in the United Kingdom and in the early exchanges Mustafizur flummoxed Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Shikhar Dhawan, who he dismissed. He was consistently the fastest bowler for Bangladesh and extracted swing, both

in and out. In partnership with skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- Bangladesh's most consistent and wily new-ball operator -- Mustafizur produced Bangladesh's best passage of play as they kept the vaunted Indian top order to just 33 for one in the Powerplay overs. If Bangladesh can sort the middle overs out, splitting Mustafizur's 10

of runs, the pressure was on India, so a second slip could have been employed for Kohli, who reaches for deliveries early on. In the fifth over, there was a wide slip and Kohli chased a Mustafizur away swinger, only for the edge to fly between keeper Mushfiqur -- who should have at least attempted the take -- and Soumya Sarkar at slip. The horse



Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim struck a 94-ball 90 to help steady the ship during a World Cup warm-up match against India at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff yesterday. However, despite his heroic knock, the Tigers lost the match by 95 runs.

PHOTO: AFP

overs between the first and last 10 overs -- thereby ensuring that he can come back bowling as fast as he did when he started -- may be a winning ploy.

More meaningful aggression needed

After Dhawan's wicket and the lack

having bolted, Mashrafe then brought in a second slip.

To be fair, he did try to keep up the pressure when KL Rahul was the new man in as there were seven fielders inside the circle when the rules demanded just five, and the same was

the case when MS Dhoni entered in the 23rd over. However, when facing the truly big teams, aggression often means recognising the rare moments that the opposition are faltering and sticking the knife in. It may well have been different had Kohli been dismissed early and Rahul exposed to the new ball.

Bowling combination

It was quite obvious that Mashrafe and the team management wanted to give the five pacers in the squad a fair run yesterday as Mashrafe, Mustafizur, Rubel Hossain, Mohammad Saifuddin and Abu Jayed delivered the first 24 overs before Shakib Al Hasan was brought on. All four spinners tried yesterday -- specialists Shakib and Mehedi Hasan Miraz, and part-timers Mosaddek Hossain and Sabbir Rahman -- copped a fair bit of stick. While that should not be cause for panic as India are one of the best teams against spin, it should raise the question of whether -- when not playing subcontinental teams -- Bangladesh should go in with four pacers.

In that regard, going by yesterday's performance, Jayed may be the one to miss out as he seemed completely ineffective if the ball is not swinging, which it will likely not if Mustafizur is given the new ball and Jayed bowls in the middle overs. The four other pacers, however, gave a good account of themselves and that may mean that Mehedi or Rubel/Saifuddin will be rotated in and out depending on the opposition and conditions.



'Need to beat six teams'

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. Hannan Sarkar played 17 Tests and 20 ODIs for Bangladesh while the only time he featured for the country at the World Cup was in the 2003 edition. The former opener shared some of his World Cup memories and more in an interview with The Daily Star's Nabid Yeasin.

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'I'm glad that they picked him'

AFP, London

South Africa coach Ottis Gibson wants England fast bowler Jofra Archer to have a good World Cup -- but only after the Proteas have played the hosts in Thursday's tournament opener at The Oval.

Archer, whose father is English, was included in the host country's World



Cup squad on the back of just three one-day international appearances after completing a three-year qualification period in March.

"He's fresh and he's obviously talented and he's got a lot of pace and he's from Barbados, so I'm glad that they picked him," Gibson, also a former England bowling coach.

Khawaja causes selection headache

REUTERS, London

Usman Khawaja has provided Australia coach Justin Langer with a selection headache ahead of the defending champions' World Cup opener on June 1 against Afghanistan with another strong outing in their final warm-up match.

The left-hander, batting in his preferred opening position, anchored Australia's five-wicket victory with the top score of 89 against Sri Lanka on Monday.

Langer now has the unenviable task of trying to decide the makeup of his batting lineup for their first game in Bristol, with captain Aaron Finch and

the recalled David Warner also in the mix to open the innings.

Khawaja, who only returned to the one-day side earlier this year after a two-year absence, has prospered upon his recall and scored 655 runs in 10 innings as an opener, well above his career average of 44.21.

Warner's return from a 12-month ban for ball tampering and his scintillating form in the Indian Premier League, where he was the top run scorer, has complicated the equation but Khawaja does not care where he bats.

"I do love opening, that's where I've batted my whole life in one-day cricket," Khawaja told reporters.



(L) Bangladesh supporters in the UK turned up in droves to watch the side's final World Cup warm-up match against India in Cardiff yesterday. (R) Mirroring the excitement abroad, local hawkers set up shop outside Gulistan market to sell jerseys and other Bangladesh team bric-a-brac.



PHOTO: BCB/STAR

BD-IND SCOREBOARD

INDIA	R/B	4s/6s
Sharma b Rubel	19/42	1/0
Dhawan lbw b Mustafizur	1/9	0/0
Kohli b Saifuddin	47/46	5/0
Rahul b Sabbir	108/99	12/4
Shankar c Mushfiqur b Rubel	2/7	0/0
Dhoni b Shakib	113/78	8/7
Pandya c Sabbir b Shakib	21/11	2/1
Karthik not out	7/5	1/0
Jadeja not out	11/4	1/1
Extras: (lb-3, nb-1, w-26)		30
Total: (For 7 wks in 50 overs)		359
Fall of wickets: 1-49, 2-49, 3-169, 4-169, 5-191, 6-216, 7-216, 8-216, 9-262, 10-264, 5-266, 6-325, 7-348.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mustafizur	8	0	43	1
Mashrafe	6	2	23	0
Saifuddin	6	1	27	1
Rubel	8	0	62	2
Jayed	3	0	41	0
Shakib	6	0	58	2
Mehedi	5	0	40	0
Mosaddek	3	0	32	0
Sabbir	5	0	30	1

BANGLADESH	R/B	4s/6s
Liton st Dhoni b Chahal	7/90	10/0
Soumya c Karthik b Bumrah	25/29	3/1
Shakib b Bumrah	0/1	0/0
Mushfiqur b Yadav	90/94	8/2
Mithun lbw b Chahal	0/1	0/0
Mahmudullah b Yadav	9/12	1/0
Sabbir b Jadeja	7/12	1/0
Mosaddek st Karthik b Yadav	0/1	0/0
Saifuddin c Yadav b Chahal	18/25	1/0
Mehedi run out	27/30	0/1
Rubel not out	0/3	0/0
Extras: (lb-10, nb-1, w-4)		15
Total: (All out in 49.3 overs)		264
Fall of wickets: 1-49, 2-49, 3-169, 4-169, 5-191, 6-216, 7-216, 8-216, 9-262, 10-264.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Shami	4	0	22	0
Bumrah	5	0	25	2
Kumar	5	0	19	0
Yadav	10	0	47	3
Shankar	6	0	46	0
Chahal	10	0	55	3
Jadeja	9.3	0	40	1

Result: India won by 95 runs.