



Bangladesh fans swarmed to The Oval yesterday as the Tigers opened their World Cup campaign against South Africa in fine fashion, recording their highest ODI total of 330 with a brilliant performance.

'Can't spell Bangladesh without a bang'

SPORTS REPORTER from London

When Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was trying his best to tone down expectations on the eve of yesterday's World Cup match against South Africa, he may as well have been talking to a brick wall as far as the Tigers' loyal fans were concerned.

Travelling to The Oval yesterday morning an hour and a half before the match was set to start, the trains conveying passengers to the station bearing the name of the iconic venue were dotted with green shirts that had a splash of red. Exiting the station itself, the trickle of green and red became a deluge that flooded the streets up to the wrought iron gates of the venue.

The proportion of Bangladeshi supporters to South Africans at that time of the morning could roughly be split 80-20 as stuffed Tigers and cries of 'Bangladesh. Bangladesh!' dominated the sights and sounds.

"We are optimistic, we will definitely beat South Africa today," said a fan who had come all the way from Essex to watch the Tigers.

Another Tiger tragic from Shadwell in London was even more optimistic.

"Oh, I think we will win today. If we bat first and score 290-300, or if South Africa bat first and we can keep them to 260, we will win. And we'll get to the semifinals; then with a bit of luck we will make the finals and if we do that, we will become champions."

This forecast was by no means uncommon. It showed that Mashrafe's comment the previous day, when he said that 'some think we have already won the World Cup, others think we have made the semis' was accurate.

Inside the ground, while Bangladeshi support was not as dominant as it was in the outside the gates -- hinting that Bangladesh fans are as intent on celebrating the occasion as they are to watch the action -- Tigers supporters still decidedly outnumbered their South African counterparts, as was evident from the volume of cheers when Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfigur Rahim were plundering boundaries.

It reached a crescendo when Mosaddek

Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad were putting the finishing touches on what would be Bangladesh's highest total in ODI cricket. When Mahmudullah hit a crisply timed six off Kagiso Rabada in the last over, a Bangladesh fan in the stands could be overheard telling someone wearing the South African colours: "You can't spell Bangladesh without a bang."

Wanting to tone down expectations is understandable, but if Bangladesh keep batting the way they did yesterday, it will prove to be a futile exercise from Mashrafe.

New Zealand speedster Lockie Ferguson believes fast bowling, like leg-spin, is an "X-factor" in one-day cricket and will play a crucial role in the World Cup.

Ferguson combined with fellow paceman Matt Henry to help New Zealand thrash Sri Lanka by 10 wickets in their opening game of the 50-over showpiece event on Saturday in Cardiff.

While Henry rattled Sri Lanka's top order with his opening spell, it was Ferguson who took key wickets in the middle with his express pace to bowl out Sri Lanka for 136.

But remind the 27-yearold Ferguson of his ability to clock speeds up to 96 mph (154 kph) and being among the top quick guns around the world, the Auckland-born bowler turns humble.

"Just like leg-spin bowlers they (fast bowlers) can turn it both ways. It's an X-factor part of the game, of course it's nice to see other fast bowlers bowling quick," Ferguson told reporters.

"Of course it's a little bit of rivalry in parts, but it's not like I am watching every ball and comparing myself," he said with a laugh.

Express bowlers have already turned on the heat on English pitches, with West Indies' Oshane Thomas helping dismantle Pakistan for just 105 with his four wickets in the second game of the tournament.



'Fast bowling A deserving reward

When South Africa captain Faf du Plessis won the toss and elected to field, a few of the more faint-hearted nature feared that Bangladesh may suffer a fate similar to their subcontinental neighbours, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. But the Tigers blew those fears away with the kind of batting that they have been displaying more often than not since their rise in the last World Cup four years ago.

In what was their opening World Cup match after four years at The Oval in London, the Tigers stroked their way to 330 for six -- their best effort in ODI cricket and also the highest innings total in this World

pitched deliveries like Pakistan had pretenders was the inability of both against the West Indies a couple of days ago when the former champions were shot out for 105. Nor did they stumble against a quality pace attack as Sri Lankan had done against New Zealand when they were bundled out for 136.

They counterattacked with such authority that it forced Du Plessis to

THIRD EYE

opt for alternative options. Young opener Soumya Sarkar set the tone for a very good total with a sublime 42 off 32 balls. The way the lefthander batted against the express

Shakib and Mushfigur to turn those big scores into big hundreds. Both were dismissed at a time when Bangladesh were looking capable of

posting a total beyond 350. But despite their departure, Bangladesh prospered in the last five overs thanks to another display of professional batting from Mahmudullah, who scored an unbeaten 46 off 33 balls. Mahmudullah found a perfect ally in young batsman Mosaddek Hossain (26 off 20 balls), who repaid the faith of the team management for his selection as the number seven batsman ahead of Sabbir Rahman.

The job was still half-done and



India skipper Virat Kohli was hit on his right thumb during practice and walked away in discomfort. However, word from the India camp suggests he "is doing fine" and should be fit for India's opening fixture against South Africa on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

Cup so far.

South Africa needed to create history to win the game -- no team batting second in a World Cup match have ever toppled a score of 330 -- and, although the Proteas tried their best in a pulsating encounter, they eventually fell 22 runs short of the target.

It was nice to hear one of the commentators remark after Bangladesh had clinched the game that it was not an upset, but a deserving reward for an up-andcoming Tigers. His statement was not something out of context but recognition of the progress the Tigers have made so far.

That progress was reflected in every facet of the game, in which the South Africans tried with all their resources

to put a pause to. The Tigers were not scared of the famed South African pace attack. They did not falter against short-

pace of Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi was a spectator's delight. It was not his raucous pull shots or exquisite cover drives, but the world of time he got that mesmerized fans most. He is increasingly becoming an asset at the top of the order for Bangladesh.

And opponents beware! If he could play longer innings it would have a devastating impact.

It was also a game where Bangladesh arguably showed that they were one of the few good teams who know how to construct an innings. The third-wicket partnership of 142 between Shakib Al Hasan (75) and Mushfiqur Rahim (78) was the product of a professional approach that involved minimum risk.

Unfortunately, what is still holding the Tigers back from going to championship material from

the Tigers knew that South Africa would come in all-guns blazing. They did come hard and in patches appeared to have tilted the balance in their favour. But a disciplined Bangladesh bowling attack held their nerve despite some sloppy catching. Soumya dropped Miller and Mahmudullah also reacted late while attempting to grab a top-edge from the left-hander at the backward point boundary. Mushfiqur Rahim somehow amended a dropped catch by running out a confused Quinton de Kock with a direct hit.

You can win a few games with those missed chances, but you cannot win tournaments. Regardless, it was a dream start for the Tigers. The onus is now on them to disprove former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum's prediction that they can't win more than one game at this World Cup.

HAPPY MOMENT



Bangladesh got the perfect start to their innings against South Africa in their World Cup opener. However, at one point the Tigers were struggling on 75 for two before two of the most experienced cricketers, Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfigur Rahim, added a record 142-run third wicket stand. It was Bangladesh's highest partnership for any wicket at World Cups, surpassing a stand of 141 between Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur against England at Adelaide in 2015.



BEST QUOTE



England have to play 300 deliveries to score 500 runs but we just need 10 deliveries to get them out.

Azhar Mahmood, Pakistan coach

