



SPORT



6s | 4s
068 | 0410
MOST 6s: HIT BY A PLAYER
FINCH/C-NILE
AUSTRALIA
004
MOST 4s: HIT BY A PLAYER
ROOT/SHAKIB
ENGLAND/BANGLADESH
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'Defence will be the best offence'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Cardiff

On the eve of their first World Cup match against South Africa on June 2, Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza talked about the importance of sticking to their own game plan rather than setting a standard set mainly by hosts England of scoring more than 350. They played their own game of building partnerships and accelerating from a solid platform, scored 330 for six and won by 21 runs against South Africa.

That game plan failed them during their two-wicket loss against New Zealand, but while Mashrafe saw the batsmen as more culpable for being bundled out for 244 on Wednesday at The Oval, it was the bowling that was under focus ahead of today's game against favourites England at the Cardiff Wales Stadium.

Even though the New Zealand match turned out to be a close one, with the Kiwis getting to 160 for

two in the 32nd over, the perception was that the Bangladesh's bowling was defensive, which in turn raised a question about whether that would be good enough against an England batting lineup hell bent on attack.

Mashrafe's answer to the question revealed a little more about Bangladesh's game plan. The Tigers have had success in ODI cricket -- be it winning an away series in West Indies a year ago, making the finals of the Asia Cup in the UAE last September or winning the tri-series in Ireland last month -- by bowling as a unit in recognition of the fact that they do not have runaway match-winners with the ball.

"The kind of cricket England play, defence will be the best offence. Over the last four years, they are in an attacking mindset in any situation," Mashrafe said in the pre-match press conference. "They always want to go close to 350-400 runs so that the other team does not have a chance.



So we have discussed that and maybe against them defence will be offence. They will attack us with their strength, maybe more than they do with other big teams, whether it is through body language or skill. So we will have to execute the plans we have to stop them. If you try to attack them too much, then it could be damaging because they are always looking to attack from the start to the end.

"So if we are defensive, giving them the chance to attack and we can get one or two wickets, we can get back on the attack. We have to be a bit mentally strong; it is the natural

game and we have to ensure that instead of going to their strengths, we attack their weaknesses."

He was also not willing to admit that they were being defensive in the last match against New Zealand. While he defended his choice of bowlers to use at certain points -- leaving Mustafizur Rahman's five overs till the last 10 overs when the match already tilted towards the Kiwis -- he decisively defended the field placings against New Zealand.

"Talking of the last match, I don't know what becomes defence and what becomes offence to you guys



when we lose," Mashrafe said. "You do analyses and you know who to attack when. I sometimes wonder if you change your questions when we lose. In the last match, five fielders were brought up and we attacked who we had to attack. At the end of the day, it depends on the bowler what kind of field set he wants.

"Shakib [Al Hasan] bowled with mid on and mid off up. I think if you review the whole match, the analysis will be better. It is best not to talk about it just from the result."

Bangladesh have good World Cup memories against England, having

beaten them in their last two World Cup encounters in 2011 and in 2015 on way to a maiden quarter final berth. Memories of Cardiff are also good as they won their two matches here so far -- against Australia in 2005 and New Zealand in the 2017 Champions Trophy, which gave them a maiden semifinal place in an ICC event. However, Mashrafe was not banking on history and instead eager to play better than the hosts today and to do it their own way. That is the attitude that brought them success against South Africa, and that seems to be the way forward in today's match.

I would say yes, we have been beating them the last two World Cup. It doesn't mean that we will make it happen again the way it did. Both teams start from the first ball, so it's very important for both teams to start well.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza
Bangladesh Captain

It is going to be a difficult game. They are a good side. I think people underestimate them. We certainly don't. All we talked about is sticking to what we do well, looking at our strengths.

Eoin Morgan
England Captain

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Tigers will start with spin: Morgan

SPORTS REPORTER from Cardiff

With rain forcing the covers to stay pinned on the centre square of the Cardiff Wales Stadium on the eve of England's World Cup match against Bangladesh today, the bowling strategies of the respective teams could make for an interesting contrast.

England skipper Eoin Morgan said that there could be a case for recalling pacer Liam Plunkett, given the prevailing conditions in Cardiff.

"Obviously, another day where the wicket is under the covers, wickets that have been played on here so far have been a bit greener and probably seamer-friendly. So that's a potential, yeah," Morgan said when asked about the possibility of an extra seamer in Plunkett during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza likes to keep things close to his chest when it comes to strategy, so there was an air of Morgan throwing down the gauntlet when he responded to a question about the openers being victims to spin in the last two matches.

"I think it's just another challenge... I'm sure that they will kick on," Morgan said. "It's

like anything, when the ball swings, it's a new challenge. Guys fall short, it's a new challenge. Bangladesh will open with spin, definitely."

A greenish wicket will likely disadvantage Bangladesh, who are likely to go in with three seamers and continue trying to choke the opposition through their main strength -- accurate spin bowling in the form of Shakib Al Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz. There is also the factor of England losing early wickets

game in Nottingham on June 3, which England lost by 14 runs.

Today's match will have an air of coming full circle for England. It was a loss to Bangladesh in Adelaide in the 2015 World Cup that knocked them out of the group stages, and it is widely assumed that result was the catalyst that started England's evolution into arguably the most feared batting lineup in ODI cricket from a timid one in 2015.

Morgan, however, did not think it was that match in particular that changed the course of the team.

"Yeah, it wasn't that game in particular. We weren't humiliated. We were beaten, again, by a better team," Morgan, whose career as England skipper began shortly before the 2015 World Cup, said. "They deserved to win that night. The humiliating games were games that happened previous to that. Games we might have been competitive and were blown away."

"It is going to be a difficult game. They are a good side. I think people underestimate them. We certainly don't. They are a side that has played a lot of cricket. Their senior players, especially, have played a lot of games, even more so than our senior players. They are a threat. But hopefully we can play well and overcome it."

The Export Leader

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against spin so far in the tournament, with Jonny Bairstow being dismissed by South Africa leg-spinner Imran Tahir in the very first over of the 2019 World Cup on May 30 and fellow opener Jason Roy being dismissed by Pakistan leggie Shadab Khan in the third over of their



'A bit unlucky with the rain'

SPORTS REPORTER from Cardiff

The gloomy weather yesterday in Cardiff, where it rained heavily until late afternoon, did no favours to Bangladesh ahead of today's World Cup match against World Cup favourites and hosts England.

Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Sabbir Rahman, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Mithun were all restricted to indoor practice while the rest of the team opted to take a break from practice because they could not train outdoors. For a team that places great importance on momentum, it was not the ideal preparation for perhaps the toughest examination of their campaign, especially as they are coming off a loss against New Zealand in their last match.

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The defeat threw light on the less-than-ideal form of some important players, and skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza included himself and star opener Tamim Iqbal in that category. Mashrafe has conceded 81 runs from 11 wicketless overs in the two matches so far, while Tamim has scored just 40 runs from 67 balls after getting starts against both South Africa and New Zealand -- uncharacteristic for a player who has been known for cashing in on good starts for the past four years.

"We are in the middle of the tournament now, so it is not as if we can change a lot through practice," Mashrafe told reporters yesterday. "But for some players, practice sessions are very important. If you talk about me, then obviously today practice was very important to top up certain things that are not happening for me on the field. Tamim is feeling the same. In that regard, I think we have been a little unlucky. For some of us the practice session was important, to get used to the wind, not being able to do which may not be a positive sign for us. But you can't do anything about the weather; we have to try to keep our confidence levels high."

Mushfiqur is one of those in form, but he has been a target of criticism for letting off Kane Williamson in the two-wicket loss against New Zealand, when he disturbed the bats with his elbow and negated a sure run-out at a crucial juncture.

"I think Mushfiqur is completely okay, and there is no reason not to be normal," said Mashrafe when asked about Mushfiqur's state after a social media barrage against the keeper. "And of course, there will be criticism surrounding those who are working. It is easy to do that. The team is supporting each other. It is normal, the people who are talking about it are the ones not able to take it normally."



Australia were in deep trouble after being sent to bat against West Indies in their second World Cup match with the defending champions struggling on 147 for six inside 31 overs. However, right-arm pacer Nathan Coulter-Nile took responsibility with the bat for Australia, smashing his maiden half-century in ODIs, en route to a career best 92 off just 60 balls. It was Coulter-Nile's blistering knock that helped Australia post a challenging 288-run total and eventually win the match by 15 runs.

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