



'MASH IS A FIGHTER'

SPORTS REPORTER from Taunton

Before the World Cup began skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza did his best to lower expectations of Bangladesh's fevered fan base but less than halfway through Bangladesh's World Cup campaign, it is the captain who is bearing the brunt of high expectations.

After three completed matches there has already been criticism of Mashrafe's bowling as Bangladesh's highest ODI wicket-taker has taken just one wicket from 21 overs while giving away 149 runs. The ever-popular Narail cricketer was the toast of Bangladesh cricket lovers less than a month ago, when he led the country to their first ODI multi-team win in Ireland.

Bangladesh bowling coach Courtney Walsh yesterday spoke out in favour of the captain. "We all know Mashrafe is a fighter. He has a slight niggly," Walsh told reporters in Taunton, referring to the hamstring injury Mashrafe picked up during the warm-up match against India on May 28. "He has delivered good spells. We have to look after him pretty well. He is determined to lead the country up front. I think it is still early days."

Among Bangladesh's pacers, his economy rate of 7.09 runs per over is actually less than that of

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Mustafizur Rahman and Mohammad Saifuddin. He was the most expensive bowler in the first game against South Africa with his six wicketless overs, but in the last game against England he was the second-most economical with one for 68 from 10 overs as England hammered 386 for six. As captain he could have been satisfied with giving away just 50 runs in nine overs during the run fest, but he hit the bullet and bowled the last over, which was hammered for 18.

"Obviously the fans want win, win, win; that's not the case," Walsh said. "We lost two games and one was rained out. If we can string a few wins together, I think they will see the depth of the team. Mash has a couple of days off, so that will help. He'll be in a better place."

Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who is yet to give his best at the World Cup in England, was seen working hard in the Tigers' first practice session following a two-day rest at Taunton yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

Holder fumes with batsmen

AGENCIES, Southampton

West Indies captain Jason Holder rued his side's 'careless shots' and failure to fire in the middle order after an eight-wicket loss to England yesterday.

"We didn't put enough runs on the board. There were a few careless shots, if we had hung in a bit longer we could have got some more in the end," a frustrated Holder said. "We need more ownership in the middle. Batters got out at crucial stages, we need to correct it. It's happened twice in two games now."

Holder also spoke about all-rounder Andre Russell, who broke down twice during his side's defeat as he struggled with the knee issues.

"It's been difficult so far for him. We've tried our best to keep him on the park but it's proven difficult. We think he can be a matchwinner for us," Holder said. "We've got to do everything we can to keep him on the park."

'May have to rethink our strategy'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Taunton

By the time Bangladesh started their practice at the Cooper Associates County Ground in Taunton, West Indies' batting had been dismantled by England in Southampton. Bangladesh are set to face West Indies in their fifth World Cup match on June 17 in Taunton, but unlike their opponents, will have had six days' gap between matches since their last World Cup game against Sri Lanka in Bristol was abandoned due to rain.

As the Tigers practised for the first time since the washed-out game against Sri Lanka on June 11, the focus had already shifted to their next match, namely the small size of the Taunton ground and what it would mean for the bowlers pitted against West Indies power-hitters like opener Chris Gayle and all-rounder Andre Russell.

"We are looking at their game now. We are coming up with some ideas and plans. They are two dangerous players we have to try to restrict, and get them out at the same time to have more control of the game," said Bangladesh bowling coach Courtney Walsh yesterday.

"We will be focused on their team itself, because they



have very good players in their team. I am sure we can perform as a team against West Indies."

That confidence comes from Bangladesh having beaten the West Indies home and away in ODI series in 2018, and also in three matches in Ireland on way to lifting their maiden ODI multi-team trophy less than a month ago. While Gayle and Russell were not a part of the tournament in Ireland, they were part of the team that lost 2-1 against Bangladesh in West Indies last summer.

"[Beating them in the West Indies] is a big plus for us. But it is a different tournament. We have to do it all over again," Walsh said.

With it raining for much of the last week in Taunton -- relenting only to allow the game between Pakistan and Australia on June 12 -- the pitch is a bit of a mystery and

Walsh said that whether or not they change their playing eleven would depend on the nature of the wicket. At the end of three matches, each of Bangladesh's pacers in skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mustafizur Rahman and Mohammad Saifuddin have conceded runs at more than seven an over. That has drawn cries to include benched pacer Rubel Hossain in the team.

"He had a very good season last year. He is bowling pretty well this year too, but because of the formation of the team, he hasn't been able to get in," Walsh said. "Still a couple of more games left in the tournament, so whenever the selectors are ready for him I just hope he is also ready."

Walsh also admitted that Taunton, with one of the shorter square boundaries in England, may prompt a rethink of their bowling strategies.

"Because of the size of this ground, we might have to re-think some of our attacks, plans and strategies. It is a much smaller ground, so we have to ensure we are more spot-on and consistent, and try to create the pressure."

Against England, West Indies lost wickets at the top and that hampered their chances of posting a formidable score. Walsh said that they would learn from the strategies England used, one of which may be to use Mustafizur Rahman -- normally seen as an old-ball bowler and one who has bowled just five overs in the first 10 overs of three matches so far -- with the new ball.

"It depends on the opposition with the new ball. We have tried him. If he gets into his rhythm pretty early, he can get us early wickets. It depends on the surface too but it is not something we have ruled out. It gives us a bit of edge if he can get the bounce with the new ball, left-arm over and around the wicket. There's every possibility he could do it here."

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ENG-WI SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES	R/B	4s/6s
Gayle c Bairstow b Plunkett	36/41	5/1
Lewis b Woakes	2/8	0/0
Hope lbw b Wood	11/30	1/0
Pooran c Buttler b Archer	63/78	3/1
Hetmyer c & b Root	39/48	4/0
Holder c & b Root	9/10	0/1
Russell c Woakes b Wood	21/16	1/2
Brathwaite c Buttler		
b Archer	14/22	0/1
Cottrell lbw b Archer	0/1	0/0
Thomas not out	0/11	0/0
Gabriel b Wood	0/3	0/0
Extras: (lb-5, w-12)		17
Total: (all out in 44.4 overs)	212	
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-54, 3-55, 4-144, 5-156, 6-188, 7-202, 8-202, 9-211, 10-212.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Woakes	5	2	16	1
Archer	9	1	30	3
Plunkett	5	0	30	1
Wood	6.4	0	18	3
Stokes	4	0	25	0
Rashid	10	0	61	0
Root	5	0	27	2

ENGLAND	R/B	4s/6s
Bairstow c Brathwaite		
b Gabriel	45/46	7/0
Root not out	100/94	11/0
Woakes c sub (Allen)		
b Gabriel	40/54	4/0
Stokes not out	10/6	2/0
Extras: (lb-2, nb-1, w-15)		18
Total: (For 2 wickets in 33.1 overs)	213	
Fall of wickets: 1-95, 2-199.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Cottrell	3	0	17	0
Thomas	6	0	43	0
Gabriel	7	0	49	2
Russell	2	0	14	0
Holder	5.1	0	31	0
Brathwaite	5	0	35	0
Gayle	5	0	22	0

Result: England won by 8 wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Joe Root.



Morgan fine, Roy a worry

AGENCIES, Southampton

Eoin Morgan insisted there was no reason to panic after the England captain and Jason Roy's injuries put a damper on their eight-wicket win against the West Indies yesterday.

The duo are now in a racing to be fit for Tuesday's game against Afghanistan.

Morgan suffered from a back spasm, which he played down, while Roy 'tweaked his hamstring'. Morgan said: "It is sore. I have had back spasms before -- we think it's that -- and they take a few days to settle down. We'll know more in the next 24 hours."

"I don't know how [Roy] pulled up -- he'll have a scan and it will take 48 hours to get the full results. When any two players go down it's a worry but we're not at panic stations. We'll do a risk assessment before the Afghanistan game."

While Morgan's injury seems unserious, Roy's is of far more concern. He left the game in the eighth over of the first innings while fielding and did not return thereafter. He had also strained the same hamstring earlier this year and spent seven weeks on the sidelines but England hope the injury is not as serious this time around.

James Vince is the reserve batsman while Moeen Ali is another option if Roy does not recover in time.

'I try to learn from Kohli'

AFP, Manchester

Pakistan's rising star Babar Azam has revealed he models himself on India captain Virat Kohli just days before the fierce rivals clash in an explosive World Cup showdown.

Babar holds the key for Pakistan against old foes India in Manchester on Sunday and the batsman has been fine-tuning his game by watching videos of the supremely talented Kohli.

Babar showed his class by scoring a brilliant 63 in Pakistan's 348-8 when they beat pre-tournament favourites England earlier in the World Cup.

His heroics gave Pakistan their only win so far in the tournament, with defeats against the West Indies and Australia, while their match against Sri Lanka was rained off.

While there is no love lost between India and Pakistan on or off the pitch, Babar is willing to admit he watches Kohli's batting and tries to learn from him.

"I watch his batting and the way he bats in various conditions and try to learn from them," Babar told reporters.

"I try to learn with experience. This is my process of learning, so I try my hundred per cent."

"His (Kohli) winning ratio is higher (for India) so I am trying to achieve that as well."

Babar, 24, says Pakistan's Champions Trophy final demolition of India two years ago has increased the team's confidence they can claim another surprise success against India this weekend.

"The Champions Trophy win gave us confidence and will also help here as well because the team is mostly the same and that win is always an inspiration," Babar said.



BABAR AZAM

Pakistan, trounced by 124 runs in the opening match of the Champions Trophy by India, hit back by crushing their bitter rivals in the final.

Their 180-run win at the Oval is the biggest over India in all ODIs.

"That win can never go off our memories and it's a big inspiration," he said.

The India-Pakistan clash will be watched by a vast global audience and Babar insists the pressure will spur his unpredictable team to produce their best.

"We are well prepared for this match because India and Pakistan matches are exciting and demanding

and the whole world watches it," Babar said.

"The whole team is positive so we are looking forward to the match. Not only me but all the players want to finish on a high, whoever hits form wants to win it."

And Babar is confident Pakistan will handle India's potent pace attack, led by world number one ODI bowler Jasprit Bumrah.

"No doubt, India have a good bowling attack but we have played well against England who also have a very good pace attack so all of us are confident the Indian pace attack will be properly handled," Babar said.

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