

Familiar foes face crunch match

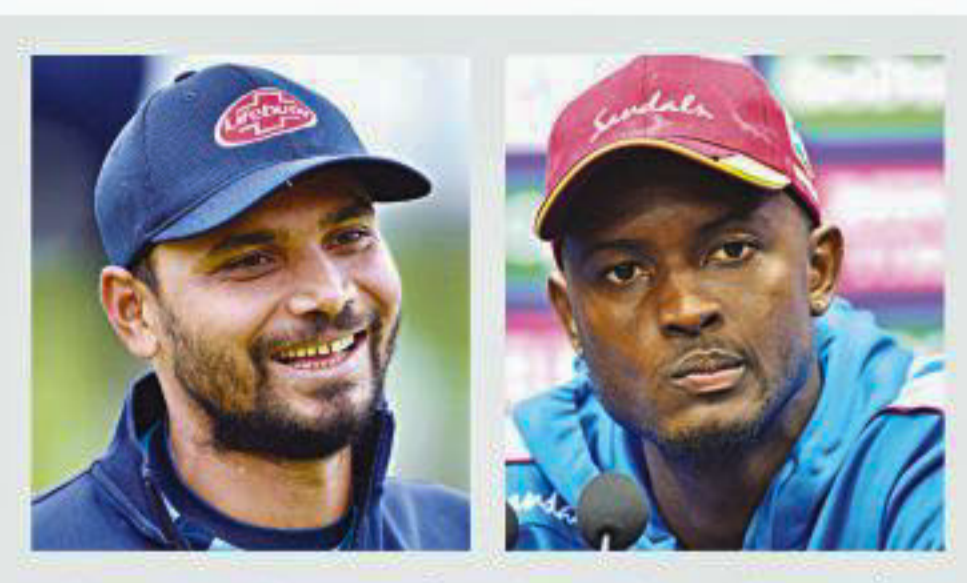
SAKEB SUBHAN from Taunton

They have played each other nine times in ODIs over a span of less than a year and in four Tests over that period. Bangladesh have had the wood on West Indies in ODIs, winning seven of those matches, including a series in the West Indies. West Indies players form one of the largest foreign contingents in the Bangladesh Premier League, so there is very little either team can do to surprise the other when they face off in a World Cup match at the Cooper Associates County Ground in Taunton today.

They are also in an identical situation in the World Cup. Each side has three points from four games, with one match being washed out. Theoretically each can still afford to lose the game, but both -- West Indies having been rejuvenated by the return of players like Chris Gayle, Evin Lewis and Andre Russell -- will be targeting a win against a foe they know pretty much inside out. When Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and his West Indian counterpart Jason Holder were speaking in their respective pre-match press conferences, their knowledge of the enemy came through.

The talking point surrounding the game has been the small boundaries in Taunton helping West Indies' big hitters and whether Bangladesh would continue to hound the West Indies with their spin strength.

"Most opponents plan about West Indies' batting, because of how they have adopted the T20 style of play in ODIs," said Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, before revealing a bit of their plans to keep the West Indians quiet. "The top five West Indies batsmen are left handers, and Mehedi [Hasan Miraz] bowled against them really well. That's a positive sign. It's a small ground too, so we have to think about that -- from one side the wind will be stronger. West Indies have so much power to do



It's a small ground so we have to think about that. West Indies have so much power to do it. Whatever the ground, whatever the wicket, we have to back our own strength.

MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA
BANGLADESH CAPTAIN

I saw the wicket today, there's quite a bit of grass on it. We'll see how it plays tomorrow. We know what to expect in a sense from Bangladesh; I can't see them being much different from that.

JASON HOLDER
WEST INDIES CAPTAIN

spinners and we don't expect them to move too far away from that," Holder said. "It's a smallish ground and I saw the wicket today as well; there's quite a bit of grass on it. We'll see how it plays tomorrow. We know what to expect in a sense from Bangladesh; I can't see them being much different from that."

Unlike their batting department, Bangladesh have faced most of West Indies' current pacers over the last year -- including during the tri-series in Ireland where the Tigers beat them in all three matches.

"We have faced their main bowling attack, but we can't relax because of that," Mashrafe said. "In tournaments like this, you have to plan differently for each team. You can't just stick to one type of mindset. We can't expect it to be an easy win because of winning seven out of nine matches."

"I guess if you win seven out of the last nine, probably yes," Holder answered with a smile when asked if Bangladesh were favourites. "It's a game of cricket, we have seen how this World Cup has panned out. Quite a few close games, one or two upsets. Cricket is played on the day and we are looking to play some good cricket tomorrow."

Playing better on the day has become a sporting cliché, but today when these familiar foes face off with spin taking on big hits and small boundaries, that is what it may come down to.



With Shakib Al Hasan making a return to full fitness, the Tigers will hope for something special from the star all-rounder when they face West Indies in a crucial World Cup match in Taunton today.

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Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim attended a practice session in Taunton yesterday, allaying fears that he might miss out on today's World Cup match against West Indies at the Cooper Associates County Ground.

Mushfiqur 'totally fine': Mashrafe

SPORTS REPORTER from Taunton

Bangladesh had an injury scare surrounding wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim after he was hit on the forearm by a Mustafizur Rahman bouncer during practice on Saturday, but skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said that Mushfiqur was 'totally fine' yesterday.

"Mushfiqur is totally fine. He had an X-Ray and MRI scan and doesn't have any issues at the moment," said Mashrafe during the pre-match press conference ahead of today's World Cup encounter against West Indies. "I am not sure, the final call will come from him and the physio. But I think he looks like he's fine."

The surest sign of Mushfiqur being okay was that he was one of the first to walk out of the team bus and was smiling widely as he entered the ground. He also took part in the warm-up game of football and the fielding drills before rain interrupted training. He however did not bat at the nets yesterday after rain relented. He

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practised his keeping and also did some running drills in the indoor nets.

Mushfiqur was hit just below the elbow while batting in the nets on Saturday morning, and came off immediately. He underwent ice treatment under the supervision of physio Thihan Chandamohan and went for a precautionary X-Ray after practice, which revealed no fracture.

The other injury concern has been pace-bowling all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin's back, which has troubled him since the warm-up match against India in May 28. After not bowling over the previous two days, Saifuddin bowled at full pelt in the nets yesterday.

Regaining focus the key

AL-AMIN

It is always safer to be populist rather than pragmatic. But that does not necessarily mean a safe option will win you a battle.

Before yesterday's India-Pakistan World Cup clash, all and sundry prescribed that it would be a cracker of a contest. Historically, that has been the case. But considering the strength of the two sides and conflicting performance graphs leading up to the showpiece event, it only held a populist notion rather than anything to do with ground reality.

Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed won the toss and opted to field; a decision driven not by emotion but pure logic. He knew that his team stood a chance to win the game if his bowlers, the strong link of his side, could upset the Indian batting juggernaut that runs deep. He was also aware of the fact that a total beyond 300 would be a tough ask for his side to chase down with a brittle middle-order.

Thankfully, the overflowing emotions revolving around an India-Pakistan game have subsided considerably in Bangladesh, mainly due to rise of the Tigers in recent years.

That emotional override, however, has taken a different shape with the

success of their own team. It was alright until that overflow of emotion penetrated the thought process of the team management.

Ever since Bangladesh's heavy defeat against England a week ago, the core of the team has seemed a bit distracted by some off-field criticisms targeting inspirational leader Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. In every presser since then, there has been more effort to defend Mashrafe than focus on other serious issues.

Bangladesh were understandably hurt after their fixture against

THIRD EYE

Sri Lanka was washed out. They have every reason to feel that they were deprived of another possible point, instead of sharing it with the Lankans. But the way the coach Steve Rhodes swiped at the ICC, the games governing body, was something that went out of proportion. It was a bit emotional from the Englishman, who knows of the fickle English weather better than anybody else in the team.

However, regaining focus will be the biggest challenge for the Tigers going into the game against the West Indies today. They have been

travelling and have gotten little chance to practice due to inclement weather for the past eight days. It is too long for comfort.

The Taunton cricket ground is relatively small compared to other English grounds, with the square boundary just over 65 meters. This is an issue that has been bothering the Tigers think tank most as they come up against a team famous for power-hitting.

The team management is also thinking of bringing about changes in the playing eleven. In the three games that Bangladesh have played so far, they fielded four bowlers with Mosaddek Hossain doing the unenviable job as a fifth bowler with his off-spin.

The idea was to give the batting more solidity. But it did not work according to plan with Mohammad Mithun not living up to the demand as a solid number five batsman. The introduction of a fifth bowler, sacrificing a batsman in that process, could be a rational but is by no means absolute.

What the Tigers need is to assert their own strengths and act accordingly instead of being worried about the opposition's strengths or being bogged down by criticism.

More than that, they need to express themselves if they are to bring their World Cup dream back on track.



RAHIM STEEL

RAHIM STEEL
নির্মাণের
অল কাউন্সার্ট

All-rounder Hardik Pandya was instrumental for India in all the three departments in their World Cup match against Pakistan yesterday. The 25-year-old scored a 19-ball 26, featuring two fours and a six, helping India to post 336 runs. The right-arm seamer then proved vital with the ball too as he removed the experienced Pakistani duo of Mohammad Hafeez and Shoaib Malik in consecutive deliveries to decisively turn things in India's favour. He was also sharp in the field, saving a few runs with his athleticism.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN SCOREBOARD

INDIA	R/B	4s/6s
Rahul c Azam b Wahab	57/78	3/2
Sharma c Wahab b Ali	140/113	14/3
Kohli c Sarfaraz b Amir	77/65	7/0
Pandya c Azam b Amir	26/19	2/1
Dhoni c Sarfaraz b Amir	1/2	0/0
Shankar not out	15/10	1/0
Jadhav not out	9/8	1/0
Extras: (b-1, lb-1, w-9)	11	
Total: (For 5 wks in 50 overs)	336	
Fall of wickets: 1-136, 2-234, 3-285, 4-298, 5-314.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Amir	10	1	47	3
Ali	9	0	84	1
Wahab	10	0	71	1
Imad	10	0	49	0
Shadab	9	0	61	0
Malik	1	0	11	0
Hafeez	1	0	11	0

PAKISTAN	R/B	4s/6s
Imamul lbw b Shankar	7/18	1/0
Fakhar c Chahal b K Yadav	62/75	7/1
Babar b K Yadav	48/57	3/1
Hafeez c Shankar b Pandya	9/7	0/1
Sarfaraz b Shankar	12/30	0/0
Malik b Pandya	0/1	0/0
Imad not out	46/39	6/0
Shadab not out	20/14	1/0
Extras: (lb-1, nb-1, w-6)	8	
Total: (For 6 wks in 40 overs)	212	
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-117, 3-126, 4-129, 5-129, 6-165.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Kumar	2.4	0	8	0
Bumrah	8	0	52	0
Shankar	5.2	0	22	2
Pandya	8	0	44	2
Yadav	9	1	32	2
Chahal	7	0	53	0

Result: India won by 89 runs (D/L method)
Player-of-the-match: Rohit Sharma.

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